



Are We There Yet?

*Auto Landscapes
and Tourism,
1913–1975*

Elizabeth Crawley King



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State Parks & Cultural Resources

Forward

The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) conducted this study to identify important places associated with transportation and tourism. Beth King, historic preservation specialist and former SHPO staff member, directed and completed the survey with the assistance of Erin Dorbin, SHPO intern, and Richard Collier, our now retired professional photographer. This work represents a comprehensive statewide study of cultural resources associated with auto tourism and transportation. We hope you enjoy learning about the history of our tourism industry and the development of Wyoming towns around our U.S. Highway system. We hope this work provides the public with a deeper appreciation of the roadside architecture of our state.

Mary Hopkins
Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer

Front cover photo: Wyoming Highway Marker at all state lines. Circa 1960's. Published by the Noble Post Card Company, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Back cover photo: Three men consulting a map on the Lincoln Highway, circa 1920.

Ludwig Svenson Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

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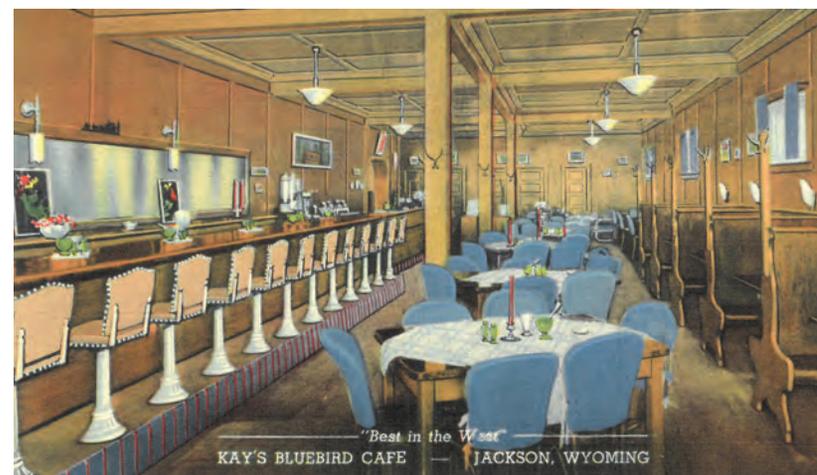
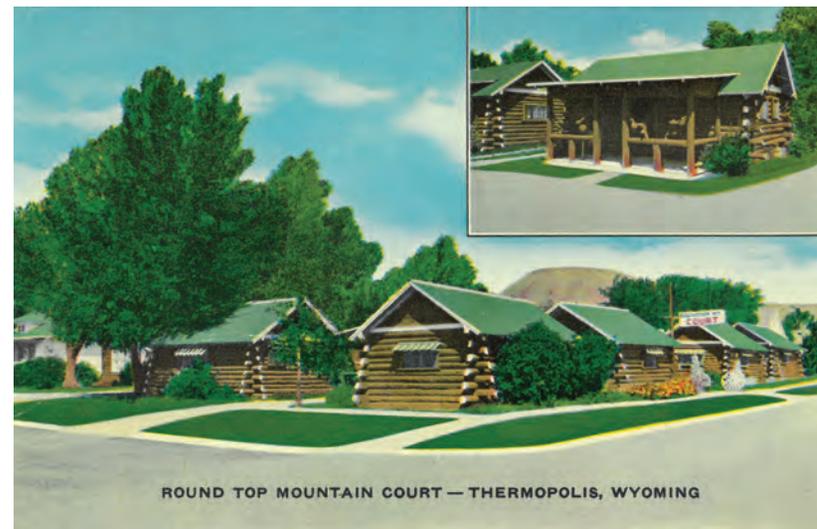
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Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



Thunderbird Lodge, Laramie. Credit: Erin N. Dorbin, 2013

Introduction, Methodology, and Accomplishments of the Survey

This report presents a summary of fieldwork undertaken between July 2013 and September 2016 along the modern-day Interstate 80 corridor in southern Wyoming. Although titled the “Lincoln Highway survey” in order to raise interest in the highway’s centennial year, the survey actually included the built environment of three major roads in Wyoming—the Lincoln Highway, U.S. Highway 30, and Interstate 80—which, in many places, are identical to or parallel one another. Indeed, the three roadways present a neat evolution from named highway to



Figure 1. Lincoln Highway map, 1916. Public domain

numbered highway to interstate highway system, mirroring the development of roads in the United States at large.

In 1913 Carl Fisher and other early financiers were successful in plotting the nation’s first transcontinental highway from



Figure 2. U.S. Highway 30 map, circa 1950. Credit: Wyoming State Archives



Figure 3. SHPO Intern Erin N. Dorbin photographs historic neon signs east of Evanston. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2013

New York City to San Francisco. The Lincoln Highway, as it was known, primarily utilized existing roads in much of the nation, including approximately four hundred miles of roads in Wyoming. By 1925 the Federal Government had assumed some responsibility for a nascent national highway system that included U.S. Highway 30, the “numbered highway” equivalent of the Lincoln. Between 1956 and 1976 Interstate 80 was constructed in segments

that generally ran parallel to the older roads, with a few important exceptions. Together these roads, along with older transportation infrastructure including the Overland Trail and Union Pacific Railroad, compose the preeminent travel corridor to and through Wyoming. Then and now this major artery is the part of Wyoming most other Americans have experienced, unless they have traveled specifically to Jackson Hole or Yellowstone National Park.

The purpose of the Lincoln Highway Buildings and Landscapes Thematic Survey was to record types of commercial architecture meant to service automobile travel between 1913 and 1975, the dates that correspond to the completed Lincoln Highway and Interstate 80, respectively. To accomplish this, the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) hired Erin Dorbin of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to complete three months of fieldwork along the corridor in late July, August, September, and early October 2013. The cost of hiring Ms. Dorbin was paid through the State of Wyoming’s Department of Administration and Information internship program. After October 2013 follow-up visits to various sites were completed by SHPO staff over the next three years in conjunction with other travel priorities.

The methodology involved in completing the survey included field notes, conversations with property owners past and present, photography, and mapping. Field notes have been entered into a Microsoft Access database designed for this purpose. Photographs have been labeled



Top: Figure 4. Eagle Rock along the Lincoln Highway ten miles east of Evanston, 1926. Credit: University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, Lincoln Highway Digital Image Collection

Bottom: Figure 5. Erin Dorbin revisits Eagle Rock and the highway in 2013. Credit: Elizabeth C. King



according to a standard labeling system.¹ Surveyed sites have been plotted to create a Google Earth kmz file. All digital files are available at SHPO in Cheyenne and have been added to the Wyoming Cultural Records Information System by SHPO staff in Laramie. Two hundred forty-nine buildings, structures, and landscape features were included in the survey; of these, sixty-four had previously been assigned a Smithsonian Site Number and had received some level of survey. One hundred eighty-five properties were newly recorded during the Lincoln Highway survey. Types of properties recorded generally supported the basic needs of automobile travelers: lodging, gas and other automobile services, and food. Several other sites were important scenic landmarks along the highways. A few other properties lacked an explicit tie to tourism activities but embody particular aspects of commercial architecture commonly associated with the built environment after the automobile achieved mass popularity. Lastly, highway infrastructure, notably bridges, was recorded.

¹ Smithsonian Site Number_Site Name_Municipality_Photographer's Initials_Month-Year_Photograph Number. For example, 48UT2648_Black and Orange Cabins_Fort Bridger_ECK_08-13_001.



Figure 6. Irma Gillespie, co-owner of the Springs Motel in Rock Springs, participated in one of the segments aired on Wyoming Public Radio in December 2013. Credit: Erin N. Dorbin

Forty sites included in the Lincoln Highway survey have been previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or, more often, as contributing buildings within National Register districts. As a result of the survey an additional forty-five sites have been determined worthy of further study for potential inclusion in the National Register. In addition, fieldwork from the survey played a vital role in the completion of the Multiple Property Documentation Form *Historic Motor Courts and Motels in Wyoming, 1913–1975*.

The year 2013 corresponded to the centennial of the Lincoln Highway, and several municipalities along the route wrote letters in support of the project happening at

this time. Many subject matter experts in Wyoming and a few from other states assisted Ms. Dorbin in her work. SHPO wishes to thank these communities and individuals for participating in the survey, thereby immeasurably strengthening the final products. Additionally numerous Wyomingites consented to be interviewed by Ms. Dorbin.

The Lincoln Highway Buildings and Landscapes Thematic Survey received media attention in 2013. A short profile was published in the Winter 2013–2014 issue of *Wyoming Lifestyle Magazine*. In addition, Micah Schweizer of Wyoming Public Radio conducted an interview with Elizabeth King and Ms. Dorbin that aired during *Morning Edition* on Monday, December 16, 2013. Four four-minute segments produced by Ms. Dorbin and Mr. Schweizer aired during the same time slot over the remainder of the week. These segments profiled businesses and business owners along the historic route, including the Wyoming Motel in Cheyenne, the Springs Motel in Rock Springs, and Pete’s Rock-n-Rye Club near Evanston, as well as “the Teepee,” a former souvenir stand turned residence near Egbert. The audio files from these segments are available in SHPO and online at <http://wyomingpublicmedia.org/post/revisting-lincoln-highways-mid-century-roadside-gems>.²

During the 2014 field season SHPO staff undertook reconnaissance survey of roadside commercial architecture and landscapes outside the Lincoln Highway corridor.

² Accessed January 19, 2017.

Modeled on the methodology established during the Lincoln Highway survey, this reconnaissance effort took place in three phases. SHPO staff photographer Richard Collier and historic preservation specialist Elizabeth King surveyed first the Yellowstone Highway corridor between Casper and Cody; second the eastern third of Wyoming including the Yellowstone Highway corridor between Cheyenne and Casper, U.S. Highway 85, and the Black and Yellow Trail corridor; and last the western third of Wyoming including historic auto routes to Jackson Hole like U.S. Highway 287 and U.S. Highway 191. Survey was not undertaken within Grand Teton National Park or Yellowstone National Park; however, future researchers are advised that these federal partners maintain inventories of important tourism-related resources within their jurisdiction.

While the reconnaissance survey undertaken outside the Lincoln Highway corridor was not as formalized an effort, the comparative data it yielded has proved essential to understanding the development of tourism and tourism-related buildings and landscapes in Wyoming. It has contributed to the completion of the Multiple Property Documentation Form *Historic Motor Courts and Motels in Wyoming, 1913–1975* and to this report. Additionally, the September 2014 Preserve Wyoming conference held in Powell included a special session on roadside commercial architecture in which Elizabeth King presented the findings



Figure 7. Many historic motor courts and motels survive as housing for long-term residents. Victor Pisano has lived at the Wyoming Motel for more than twenty years and was interviewed in one of the segments aired on Wyoming Public Radio in December 2013. Credit: Erin N. Dorbin

of the statewide survey prior to a keynote address by Dr. Chester Liebs, author of the seminal text *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*.



The Warwhoop, a former U.S. Highway 30 souvenir stand moved across the highway and converted to a dwelling circa 1965. Credit: Erin N. Dorbin, 2013

Purpose of and Goals for the Survey

Prior to 2013 the majority of SHPO study of the historic auto roads in Wyoming was limited to ground-truthing and evaluating historic roadbeds, not to examining the historic built environment within their corridors. Additionally, little or no historic inquiry into mid-twentieth century architecture had happened. Eileen Starr's *Architecture in the Cowboy State*, published in 1992, concludes with 1940. SHPO's series of historic context reports covers a myriad of topics ranging from archaeological resources to nineteenth-century settlement of the West to Depression-era Federal projects in Wyoming, but an in-depth study of the importance of tourism to

the state was lacking. This survey seeks to fill the gap in attention paid both to twentieth-century resources and to tourism, a major economic driver in Wyoming. As the importance of so-called heritage tourism becomes increasingly clear, there is greater recognition of a subset of travelers seeking unique experiences with local history and culture. This can be of benefit to mom-and-pop motels and cafés and other small tourism-oriented businesses in communities around the state. SHPO staff hopes that survey efforts have encouraged appreciation of the mid-twentieth-century commercial landscapes of Wyoming and will inspire preservation efforts for decades to come.

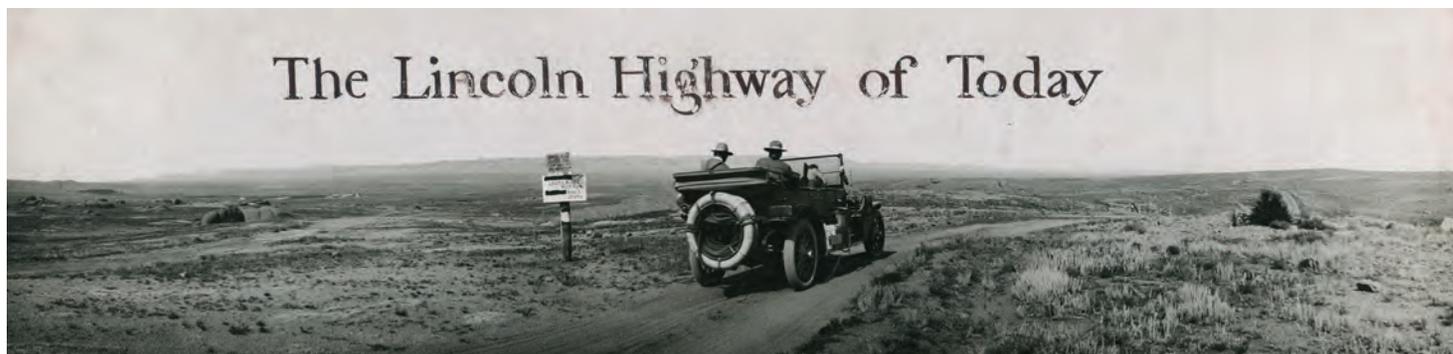


Figure 8. The Wyoming plains near Laramie. Photograph not dated. Credit: University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, Lincoln Highway Digital Image Collection



Pete's Service Station, Pine Bluffs. Credit: Erin N. Dorbin, 2013

Location, Topography, and Climate

The Lincoln Highway, U.S. Highway 30, and Interstate 80 are located in southern Wyoming and cross five counties between the Nebraska and Utah borders. From east to west, they are: Laramie, Albany, Carbon, Sweetwater, and Uinta. The corridor includes several Wyoming towns, including Pine Bluffs, Cheyenne, Laramie, Medicine Bow, Rawlins, Rock Springs, Green River, and Evanston, as well as a number of smaller communities or former communities. The route covers over four hundred miles of Wyoming, and so includes geographic variety. Between Pine Bluffs and Cheyenne the landscape consists of shortgrass prairie and scrub typical of the High Plains. Between Cheyenne and Laramie the road reaches its highest point from coast to coast as it crosses Sherman Summit at 8200 feet above sea level.

The highway corridor descends into Laramie; there, modern I-80 departs from the older route taken by the Lincoln Highway/US 30. The older route leaves Laramie and heads north through the towns of Bosler, Rock River, and Medicine Bow before turning south to join I-80 at Walcott. When I-80 was constructed between Laramie and Rawlins, the project engineers decided to shorten the route by constructing a straight line of highway between the two



towns. Today, snow storms near Elk Mountain frequently close I-80—the very reason the Medicine Bow loop was utilized in the earlier transcontinental routes. Between Rawlins and Rock Springs, the route crosses nearly one

Figure 9. Panorama of Pine Bluffs, 1913. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Left: Figure 10. Postcard depiction of Telephone Canyon between Cheyenne and Laramie, “the winding avenue thru which the Lincoln Highway climbs the divide to Sherman Hill.” Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



Right: Figure 11. Postcard depiction of the Bitter Creek Valley between Rawlins and Rock Springs, “a barren desert with alkali wastes, eroded buttes and bluffs and twisting ravines and arroyos.” Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



Bottom: Figure 12. Looking east along U.S. Highway 30 through the town of Green River, Tollgate Rock in the distance. Circa 1930. Credit: Russell Rein, private collection

hundred miles of the Red Desert, where few services were or are available to travelers past and present. Green River is a scant twelve miles farther; here the route crosses the town’s namesake river. Evanston is located on the Utah border, just before the corridor enters Echo Canyon.

The Yellowstone Highway connected Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado to Yellowstone. It created a roughly diagonal line crossing Wyoming from the southeast (Cheyenne) to the northwest (Cody). Between Cheyenne and Casper the landscape is typical of the High Plains. West of Casper, the Wind River Canyon presented a major obstacle to motorists prior to the construction of a road through the canyon in 1924. The Big Horn Hot Springs in Thermopolis was a major tourist destination in its own right during much of the period covered in this report. Leaving Thermopolis, motorists crossed the arid Bighorn

Basin on their way to Cody. The Black and Yellow Trail created an east-west connection between the Black Hills of South Dakota and Yellowstone National Park. Leaving



South Dakota, motorists passed through the western edge of the Black Hills, including Devils Tower, which would grow in importance as a tourist destination over the twentieth century. Motorists then drove through the grasslands of the Powder River Basin before a spectacular if likely harrowing crossing of the Bighorn Mountains. Once in the Bighorn Basin, the Black and Yellow Trail joined the Yellowstone Highway corridor to Cody.

A consistent theme in Wyoming history is the concentration of multiple transportation routes in a few major corridors. This reflects the challenging topography and climate of the state, whether due to the necessity of crossing various mountain ranges, or to the lack of water in Wyoming's arid basins. For example, the emigrant trails—the Oregon, California, Mormon Pioneer, and Pony Express trails—take different routes in many of the other states they cross but are essentially the same for much of Wyoming out of geographic necessity. Similarly, the Lincoln Highway followed the same route as the First Transcontinental Railroad and Overland Trail because the same towns that developed to support the railroad and flourished because of the railroad could provide services to automobile travelers.

Early motorists were advised to be prepared to camp along the Lincoln Highway west of Omaha, Nebraska, and



instructed to carry a five gallon milk can for water west of Cheyenne.³ These warnings reflect the scarcity of goods and services for motorists in the West, as well as the distance between Wyoming towns. Although the fifty miles between Cheyenne and Laramie or the one hundred miles between Rawlins and Rock Springs is not an obstacle for modern

Figure 13. Aerial view of Chugwater, between Cheyenne and Casper on the Yellowstone Highway and U.S. Highway 87. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

³ *The Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway* (Detroit: Lincoln Highway Association, 1916), 17, 19.

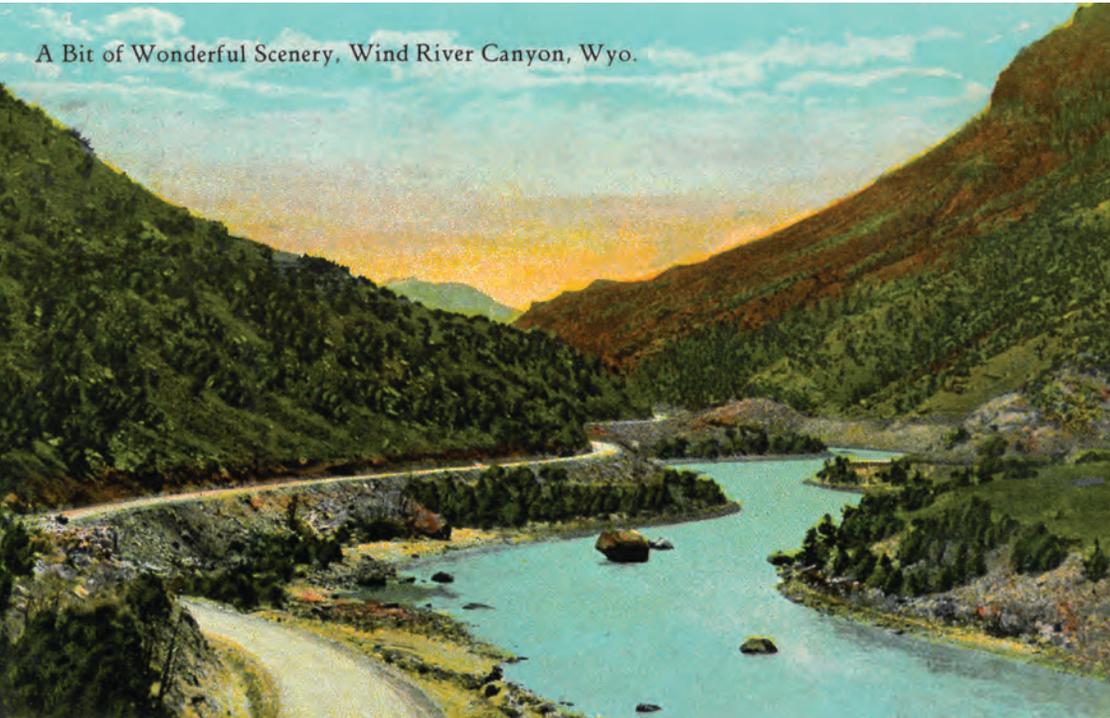


Figure 14. Postcard in circulation during the 1930s depicting the Yellowstone Highway through Wind River Canyon. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

drivers, early motorists traveling a maximum of around one hundred miles per day⁴ had to carefully consider the sparse population of the state when equipping themselves for their journey. As automobile technology advanced and services for travelers became more prevalent, motorists worried less and less about these factors, and by the interstate era, had little concern in this area, although travelers today are still reminded to keep their gas tanks full.

For many travelers, the open, windswept landscapes of Wyoming are unlike other parts of the United States they may have seen. For this reason, the survey included important geographic features remarked upon in period documents or depicted in historic postcards. Tollgate Rock, Church Buttes, and Eagle Rock are examples of landmarks that were anticipated for miles and celebrated on arrival in family photographs. Especially in the absence of big cities or “tourist trap” destinations, these natural landmarks provided important ways to mark the distance traveled.

⁴ Ibid., 13. According to the 1916 official road guide the Lincoln Highway was 3,331 miles long. The Lincoln Highway Association asserted that motorists could complete the route in twenty to thirty days, assuming motorists could maintain an eighteen-mile-an-hour driving time for ten hours a day. This speed would have been impossible to achieve on Wyoming’s unimproved roads. I am assuming here that motorists would have needed four or five days to cross approximately 440 miles of Wyoming if they did not experience major delays.



Left: Figure 15. Tourists driving west from Cody to Yellowstone National Park through Shoshone Canyon. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

Right: Figure 16. Looking west along U.S. Highway 16 through Ten Sleep Canyon. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



The former route of the Lincoln Highway, now Uinta County Road 233, and Church Buttes. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2013

The Development of Auto Roads in Wyoming, 1913–1975

Wyoming has been a destination for tourists since the completion of the First Transcontinental, or Union Pacific, Railroad in 1869. In addition to its primary purpose of transporting goods and passengers cross-country, the Union Pacific offered leisure travel via its route across the southern portion of Wyoming. When additional rail lines were completed in the state, railroads delivered tourists to locations near the sites they had come to see—such as Yellowstone National Park or the national forests—where they would then proceed by stagecoach or on horseback to their destinations. At the turn of the twentieth century the most convenient way to access Yellowstone National Park, which had been established in 1872, was via the Northern Pacific Railroad’s Yellowstone Branch Line that ran between Livingston and Gardiner, Montana, on the north edge of the park near Mammoth Hot Springs (Figure 17).⁵ For this reason travel to Yellowstone National Park did not strongly influence travel through Wyoming prior to the construction of the first named highways in the state.

⁵ Hal K. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 45-47. Rothman notes that the Yellowstone Branch Line was the first rail line in the western United States to convey passengers specifically to a tourist destination.



Figure 17. Postcard depiction of the Gardiner, Montana, railroad station on the Northern Pacific Railroad’s Yellowstone Branch Line circa 1905. This was the most convenient way to enter Yellowstone National Park prior to the introduction of automobiles to the park. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

In the early twentieth century, despite growing national interest in auto tourism, the Department of the Interior maintained that automobiles would not be allowed in the national parks. When questioned as to the feasibility of allowing automobiles in Yellowstone, superintendent Maj. Harry Benson replied, “The character of the roads, the nature of the country, and conditions of the transportation in this park render the use of automobiles not only inadvisable and dangerous, but to my mind it would be practically criminal to permit their use.” Benson was writing in 1909, when between fifteen hundred and eighteen hundred head of horses pulled stagecoaches over the recently-completed, narrow, often one-way Grand Loop Road during the tourist season, and he feared that horses and automobiles could not safely share the roads.⁶ Yellowstone was not the only national park to resist private automobiles, but it had a special reason for doing so. Early legislation regarding the park had forbidden the use of steam vehicles within park boundaries. This legislation was intended to keep railroads from crossing the park, but the law was thereafter interpreted to cover all power vehicles, including automobiles.⁷

Despite the reluctance of park administrators, nascent automobile clubs were determined to gain access to Yellowstone and other national parks in the West. These

clubs had an exceedingly strong influence on park service policy. By 1911 the National Park Service had concluded that the biggest obstacle to increasing park visitation, a major concern at the time, was limited automobile access. In 1915 Yellowstone was opened to automobiles for the first time, a major victory for automobile clubs (Figure 18). Yellowstone’s concessioner phased out horse-drawn



Figure 18. Motorists waiting to enter Yellowstone near Mammoth Hot Springs on the first day automobiles were officially allowed in the park, August 1, 1915. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

⁶ Laura E. Soulliere, “Historic Roads in the National Park System: Special History Study” (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1995), https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/roads/index.htm (accessed January 3, 2017).

⁷ “Automobiles for the Park,” *Basin Republican* (Basin, WY), January 10, 1908, <http://newspapers.wyo.gov/>.

stagecoaches during the 1917 season, replacing them with touring cars and motor buses. By 1920 the National Park-to-Park Highway connected twelve national parks in the western United States, including Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado to Yellowstone and Yellowstone to Glacier National Park in Montana (Figure 19).⁸

Automobile clubs had earlier roots in the Good Roads Movement, which originated among rural Americans in the 1870s. Organizers argued that road construction and maintenance should be supported by national and local government as it was in Europe. Road building in rural areas would allow rural residents to gain social and economic benefits enjoyed by urban citizens with access to railroads, trolleys, and paved streets. Farmers in particular could benefit from reliable roads to transport crops to market. During the bicycle craze of the late nineteenth century, cyclists joined the cause, reasoning bicycles could be more fully enjoyed on good country roads.⁹

Bicycles declined in popularity after the turn of the twentieth century as interest in automobiles grew, but there was considerable overlap between cyclists and early automobile owners and mechanics at the turn of the

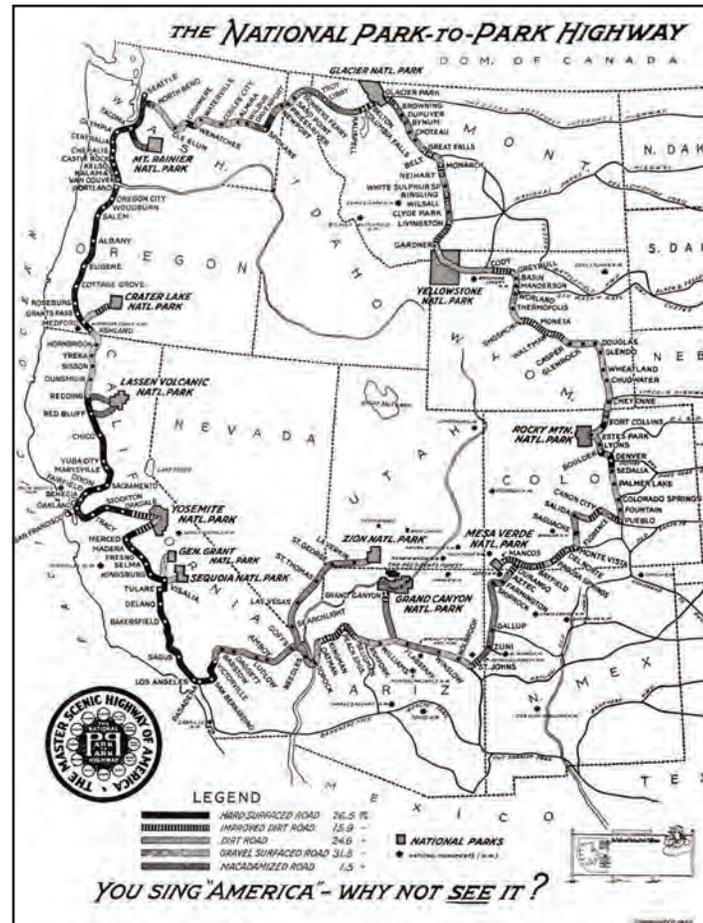


Figure 19. The National Park-to-Park Highway connected twelve of the United States' oldest national parks when completed in 1920. In 1916 the Yellowstone Highway connected Rocky Mountain National Park near Estes Park, Colorado, to Yellowstone National Park and was the first segment of the larger road to be completed. Public domain

⁸ Soulliere, "Historic Roads in the National Park System"; Lee Whiteley, *The Yellowstone Highway: Denver to the Park, Past and Present* (Boulder, CO: Johnson Printing Company, 2001), 9-15. For a discussion of the influence of automobiles on the character of the national parks, see David Louter, "Glaciers and Gasoline: The Making of a Windshield Wilderness, 1900-1915," in *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*, ed. David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001).

⁹ Isaac B. Potter, *The Gospel of Good Roads: A Letter to the American Farmer* (New York: The League of American Wheelmen, 1891).



Figure 20. Elmer Lovejoy driving an early automobile in Laramie, circa 1900. Credit: Elmer Lovejoy Papers, Box 1, Folder 21, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

century. Elmer Lovejoy, a Laramie bicycle shop owner, was the first man to own an automobile in Wyoming (Figure 20). He assembled the machine between 1897 and 1898 from parts he ordered from Chicago. Lovejoy took his horseless carriage for what is likely the first car ride in Wyoming on May 7, 1898.¹⁰ Other early automobile owners included physicians and sheep ranchers, relatively high-status members of their communities. Rancher J.B. Okie purchased a 1906 Great Smith—reportedly central Wyoming’s first car—and had it shipped to his home in Lost Cabin via rail and freight wagon. Okie was a major employer in command of a large estate and soon had his men building roads to and through Lost Cabin.¹¹

In the winter of 1908 the Great Auto Race between New York City and Paris crossed Wyoming along a route that roughly followed the Union Pacific Railroad and that would set precedent for the route of the Lincoln Highway, the nation’s first transcontinental highway, a few years later (Figure 21). The 1909 Cheyenne Frontier Days included a two-hundred-mile auto race, where a world record for speed was set, among the usual rodeo events. By 1910 automobiles had become relatively common in Wyoming, creating needs for new legislation. In 1913 a law set the speed limit at twelve miles per hour in towns. In 1914 the State of Wyoming required that all automobiles should be licensed,

¹⁰ Phil Roberts, “Lovejoy’s Toy: Wyoming’s First Car,” *Buffalo Bones: Stories of Wyoming’s Past*, http://www.uwyo.edu/robertshistory/buffalo_bones_lovejoys_toy.htm (accessed January 3, 2017).

¹¹ Tom Rea, “J.B. Okie, Sheep King of Central Wyoming,” *WyoHistory.org*, <http://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/j-b-okie-sheep-king-central-wyoming> (accessed January 3, 2017); Editorial, *Natrona County Tribune* (Casper, WY), March 22, 1906, <http://newspapers.wyo.gov/>.

and in 1917 the Wyoming Legislature created the Wyoming Highway Department, in part so that the state would qualify for federal funding for road projects. The legislature authorized the acceptance of federal aid on a matching basis. The matching funds were raised through a bond issue of \$2.8 million, approved overwhelmingly by popular vote in April 1919. A second bond issue of \$1.8 million passed in 1921. Thereafter, the Oil and Gas Leasing Act of 1920 and the gasoline tax of 1923 poured royalties into Wyoming's matching fund. By 1918, 15,900 automobiles were registered in Wyoming, ten times as many as five years before. By 1920 twenty-four thousand automobiles had been registered, and in 1930 there were sixty-two thousand registered autos in the state.¹²

Not only did automobiles bring profound social change to Wyoming, but also widespread changes to the physical characteristics of towns and other small communities. Historic commercial centers, often thought of as “downtowns,” had not been developed with automobiles in mind and lacked convenient and safe places to park these treasured vehicles. Storefronts were designed to appeal to traffic on foot or conveyed by horses. The new speed made possible by automobiles rendered much signage and many window displays ineffective. Within a matter of years a



Figure 21. The Great Auto Race of 1908 crossed Wyoming along a route that followed the Union Pacific Railroad and would set precedent for the Lincoln Highway. On March 11, after experiencing difficulties with huge snowdrifts west of Medicine Bow, the American car chose to cross the frozen North Platte River near Fort Steele rather than struggle through the snow. Credit: Elmer Lovejoy Papers, Box 1, Folder 21, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

¹² Emmett D. Chisum, “Crossing Wyoming by Car in 1908—New York to Paris Automobile Race,” *Annals of Wyoming* 52, no. 1 (1980): 34–39; Phil Roberts, “The ‘Cheyenne 200’: The 1909 Auto Race Rival to Indianapolis,” *Buffalo Bones: Stories of Wyoming’s Past*, http://www.uwyo.edu/robertshistory/cheyenne_200_auto_race.htm (accessed January 3, 2017); Phil Roberts, “The Oil Business in Wyoming,” *WyoHistory.org*, <http://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/oil-business-wyoming> (accessed January 3, 2017); T.A. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 2nd Ed., Revised (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 407–408, 424; Julie Francis, “Historic Context and Evaluation of Automobile Roads in Wyoming,” Draft (Cheyenne, 1994). On file at the Wyoming Department of Transportation.

vast network of improved roads allowed Wyomingites and visitors to the state to travel with unparalleled freedom, shortening distances in a temporal sense and connecting isolated communities to the larger world.

The first links in the growing network of roads were the named highways of the 1910s. Despite the efforts of the Good Roads Movement, national and local governments had yet to take interest in constructing and maintaining roads. Instead boosters—often including businessmen who stood to gain from increased sales of auto parts or gasoline—led a grassroots movement on behalf of automobile enthusiasts. Boosters selected a route over existing roads, often networks of varying quality that included city streets, freight and wagon roads, and abandoned railroad grades. The route was given an evocative name echoed in the name of the trail association formed to promote the route. The trail association collected dues from businesses in towns along the way, published trail guides and newsletters, held conventions, and advocated for improvement and use of the route. Association goals included the promotion of the named route, of the Good Roads Movement, and of cities and businesses along the route.¹³

In 1912 an Indiana entrepreneur and former auto racer named Carl Fisher began promoting his idea for a transcontinental highway to stretch from New York City



Figure 22. Carl Fisher, auto racer and manufacturer of compressed carbide-gas headlights, was one of the first Americans to promote the idea of a transcontinental highway. He founded the Lincoln Highway Association in 1913. This portrait was taken in 1909. Credit: George Gratham Bain Collection, Library of Congress

to San Francisco (Figure 22). At the time there were over two million miles of rural roads in the United States, and between 8 and 9 percent of those roads were “improved,” meaning they were constructed of gravel, brick, oiled earth, or other ephemeral materials. Maintenance fell to those who lived along the roads and had the greatest need for them. Many states had constitutional prohibitions against funding internal improvements, and the Federal Government had not yet seen fit to provide money toward road construction and maintenance.

Fisher formed the Lincoln Highway Association (LHA) in 1913. As the manufacturer of Prest-O-Lite compressed carbide-gas headlights, he was an effective fundraiser among

¹³ Richard F. Weingroff, “From Names to Numbers: The Origins of the U.S. Numbered Highway System” (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration), <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/numbers.cfm> (accessed January 3, 2017).



Figure 23. This 1922 photograph of the Lincoln Highway shows a section of highway west of Wamsutter that utilized an old Union Pacific railroad grade. Credit: University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, Lincoln Highway Digital Image Collection

his associates in the auto industry. Many manufacturers and oilmen saw public highways as a way to encourage Americans to buy cars and automobile accessories and services. An important exception was Henry Ford, who told Fisher as long as private citizens were willing to fund public infrastructure, the Federal Government would not be motivated to allocate funds to roadbuilding.

Most of the money raised from private donors was spent in advertising the Lincoln Highway rather than improving it. The LHA sponsored seedling miles in several states, including Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska, though none were constructed in Wyoming. Seedling miles were

short concrete sections constructed through donations from the Portland Cement Association and were intended to demonstrate the desirability of permanent roads. In general, though, the LHA never succeeded in raising the amount of money necessary for coast-to-coast improvements. Instead the highway relied on existing roads.¹⁴ In Wyoming the Lincoln Highway traversed the corridor established by the Overland Trail and the First Transcontinental railroad and telegraph line. Between Rawlins and Rock Springs the highway utilized an abandoned Union Pacific railroad grade (Figure 23). In western Sweetwater County and Uinta County the highway followed the mid-nineteenth-century route of the Mormon pioneers. To compensate for the lack

¹⁴ Richard F. Weingroff, "The Lincoln Highway" (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration), <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/lincoln.cfm> (accessed January 4, 2017).

of improved roads, the LHA and other trail associations marked their routes with painted signs or insignia on telephone poles, rocks, buildings, and other surfaces within easy sight of the roads (Figure 24).¹⁵

Because the named highways were not planned, designed, and constructed in the sense that modern interstate highways are, the “official” route also changed over time. For example, the route described in the *Official Road Guide to the Lincoln Highway* in 1915, the first year the guide was published, differs at several points in significant ways from the route published in the 1924 fifth (and final) edition of the road guide, reflecting road improvements that happened within the intervening nine years, causing different sections of road to be preferable to the original recommendations.¹⁶ Additionally, guides provided a recommended route, but road conditions might make some stretches impassable at certain times, and so motorists had to be prepared to detour as needed.

The Black and Yellow Trail, the total length of which stretched from Chicago to Yellowstone National Park via the Black Hills of South Dakota, ran from Sundance to Moorcroft, then to Gillette, Sussex, and Buffalo before crossing the Bighorn Mountains to join with the Yellowstone Highway, another auto trail, at Worland. The inaugural drive of the Black and



Figure 24. This road crew placed Lincoln Highway route markers in the Red Desert between Rawlins and Rock Springs. A route marker leans against the rear of the truck. Photograph not dated. Credit: University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, Lincoln Highway Digital Image Collection

Yellow Trail, referred to as the “Pathfinder Tour,” took place in August of 1913. The booster chairman made the following report:

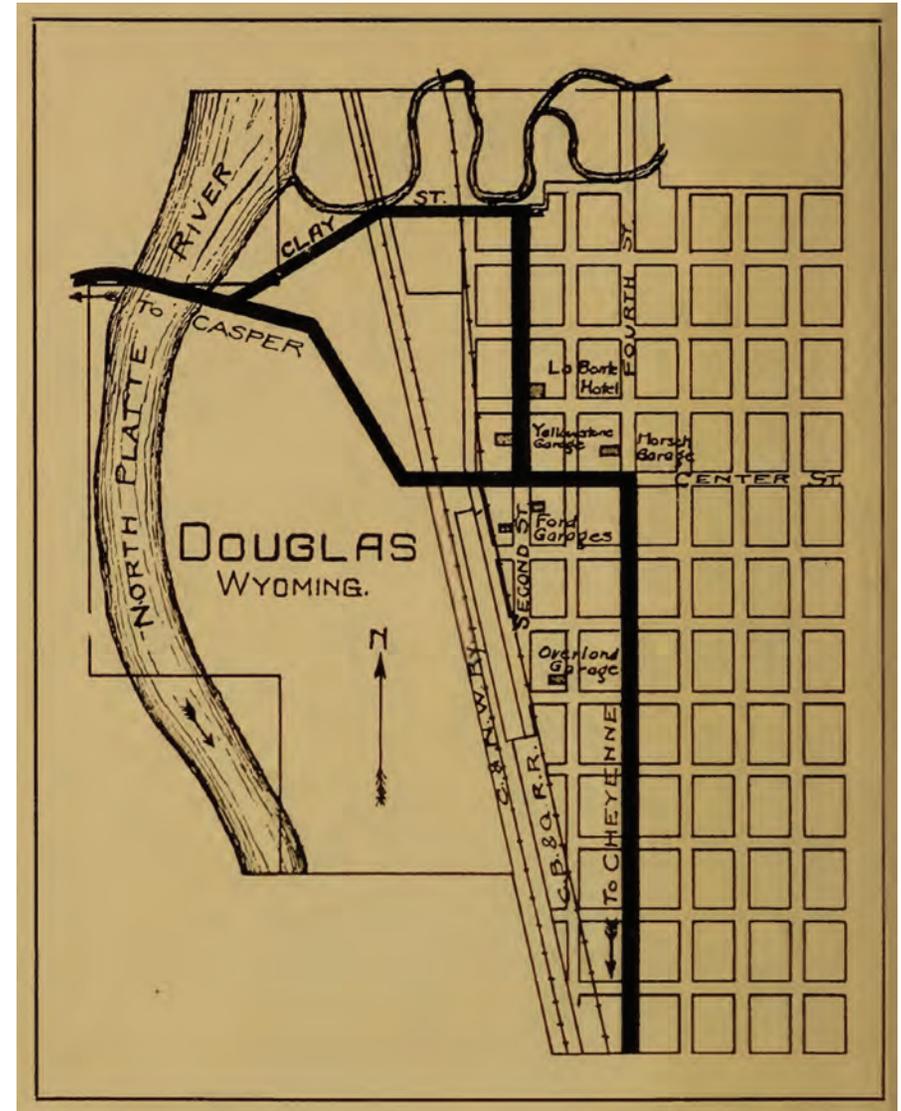
¹⁵ Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 407.

¹⁶ The modern Lincoln Highway Association, a historical society, provides an excellent map demonstrating the way the route changed during the 1910s and 1920s and offering a good comparison between the route of the Lincoln Highway, U.S. Highway 30, and modern Interstate 80. <https://www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org/map/> (accessed January 4, 2017).



Left: Figure 25. This undated photograph was taken somewhere in the Bighorn Mountains. The Black and Yellow Trail is visible in the near distance. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

Right: Figure 26. This map from the 1916 *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association* shows the route of the highway through Douglas. Public domain



[The trail] is a prairie road. It goes through a most interesting country. Evidences of considerable improvements were found along the line. In Crook county the road was undergoing a change in many places to avoid steep grades, etc. New culverts and bridges were being installed. . . . There is only one criticism which the committee can offer, viz: these counties have neglected to give as much attention as they should to the markings [i.e., insignias identifying the highway and its route]. If this department is looked after the road will be under all of the circumstances meritorious.¹⁷

In 1914 the *Converse County Review* reported that the Black and Yellow Trail “would be very good except for chuck holes.”

Chuck holes that reduce the running time of tourists by half. Chuck holes that must be damaging to loaded wagons or light vehicles as well as automobiles. Chuck holes that can be eliminated at very little expense but which will not be because there is not a county commissioner in the world who can be made to see how uncalled for they are. One can easily imagine that all commissioners are in league with the manufacturers of springs.¹⁸

The Yellowstone Highway, which opened in 1915, was another major named highway in Wyoming. It was organized at a meeting of the Douglas Good Roads Club several years before, but did not open until 1915 because that was the year automobiles were first admitted into Yellowstone, as well as the year Rocky Mountain National Park northwest of Denver, Colorado, was established. The Yellowstone Highway was intended to link the two national parks. In Wyoming it originally spanned from Cheyenne to Wheatland, then to Douglas, Glenrock, Casper, Lost Cabin, Thermopolis, and Worland, where it joined the Black and Yellow Trail, and then to Basin, Burlington, and Cody before terminating at the east entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

By 1924, the year the Wyoming Highway Department opened an auto road through the Wind River Canyon, the route changed between Casper and Thermopolis to include Shoshoni rather than Lost Cabin. The highway as described in the *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association* utilized part of the Bridger Trail and required navigating a pass through the Bridger Mountains before emerging at Buffalo Creek south of Thermopolis (Figure 27). J.B. Okie, one of the first car owners in the state and the owner of the Oasis Hotel in Lost Cabin, was the Yellowstone Highway Association commissioner

¹⁷ “Black and Yellow Trail Meritorious,” *Crook County Monitor* (Sundance, WY), October 16, 1913, <http://newspapers.wyo.gov/>.

¹⁸ “Automobile Trip to Buffalo Through Powder River Valley,” *Bill Barlow’s Budget and Converse County Review* (Douglas, WY), August 20, 1914, <http://newspapers.wyo.gov/>.

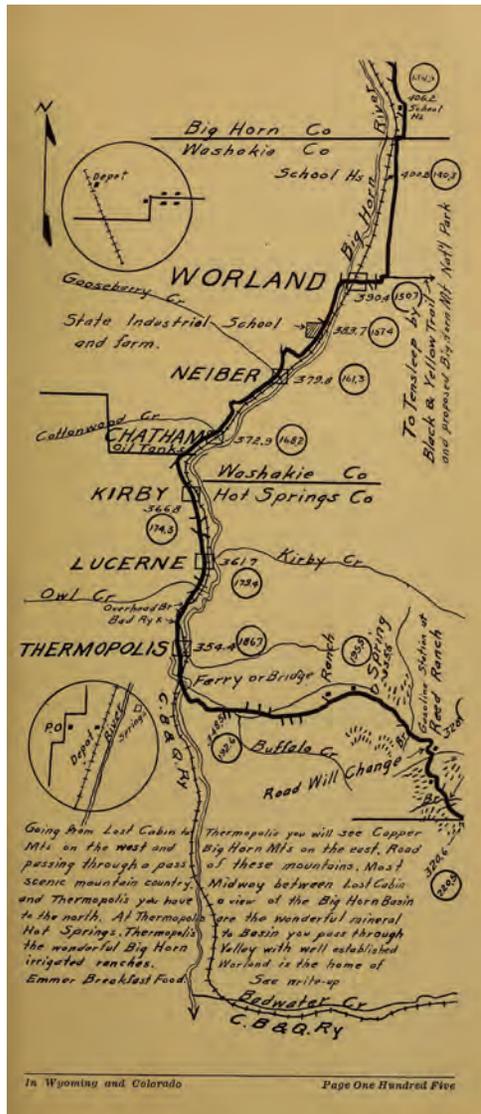


Figure 27. This map from the 1916 *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association* shows part of the original route between Lost Cabin and Thermopolis through the Bridger Mountains. By 1924 the Wyoming Highway Department had constructed an auto road through the Wind River Canyon that allowed motorists to access Thermopolis via Shoshoni, roughly following the route of the Chicago, Quincy and Burlington Railroad shown on this map. Public domain

representing Fremont County.¹⁹ This is likely the reason the route book favors the road through Lost Cabin rather than a similar route that utilized Birdseye Pass, an alternate means of reaching Thermopolis. By 1920 the Yellowstone Highway had been joined with other named highways in the Rocky Mountains and Pacific West to form a grand loop connecting twelve national parks called the National Park-to-Park Highway (Figure 19), and it is often referred to by this name in the 1920s. The Yellowstone Highway was the first segment of this larger road to be completed.

Like the LHA, the Yellowstone Highway Association published an official route guide, though it appears that it was not revised or reissued after its initial 1916 publication. No similar publication is known to exist for the Black and Yellow Trail in Wyoming. The road guides were full of advice to both seasoned and novice motorists of the West, such as “West of Cheyenne, Wyoming, always fill your gas tank at every point gasoline can be secured, no matter how little you have used from your previous supply. This costs nothing but a little time and it may save a lot of trouble.” The guides also included advertisements for tourist services in major towns along the routes, and some of the buildings that housed these services still stand. The Plains Hotel in Cheyenne, for

¹⁹ *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association in Wyoming and Colorado* (Cody, WY: Gus Holm, 1916); Robert G. and Elizabeth L. Rosenberg, “Moneta Divide EIS Project: Class III Inventory of Six Historic Linear Resources in Fremont and Natrona Counties, Wyoming” (Longmont, CO, 2014), 202–209. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.



When In Cheyenne Stop at
THE PLAINS HOTEL

European Plan

FIRE PROOF

150 Rooms, 65 With Connecting Bath

Every Modern Convenience

Popular-Priced Cafe. Service Unexcelled

Located But One and One-Half Blocks
From Stations

Rates \$1.00 Per Day
and Up

Harry P. Hynds Proprietor

In Wyoming and Colorado Page Twenty-nine

Figure 28. The Plains Hotel in Cheyenne advertised in both the Lincoln and Yellowstone highway road guides. This page is taken from the 1916 *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association*. Public domain

example, is advertised in both the Lincoln and Yellowstone highway road guides (Figure 28).²⁰

In 1919 the Custer Battlefield Highway was organized between Des Moines, Iowa, and Glacier National Park in northwest Montana (Figure 29). In Wyoming it utilized the same route as the Black and Yellow Trail between the South Dakota-Wyoming border and Gillette, then left the trail to run north through Sheridan, Ranchester, and Dayton before crossing into Montana.²¹ The Custer Battlefield Highway was a significant part of the Sheridan County tourist economy but had little or no social or economic impact on the rest of Wyoming. It is considered of secondary importance to the Lincoln and Yellowstone highways and the Black and Yellow Trail in this respect. Several other named highways were promoted in Wyoming but all mirrored the route of auto trails previously discussed. One exception is the Rocky Mountain Highway, which entered Wyoming below Laramie, connected Laramie to Woods Landing, Encampment, and Saratoga, then ran northwest to Rawlins, Lander, and Dubois and terminated at Moran Junction, the southeast entrance to Grand Teton National Park. Similarly, the Atlantic Yellowstone Pacific Highway and the Grant Highway followed the Yellowstone Highway until they diverged at Shoshoni, leading instead to Riverton, Dubois, and Moran Junction.²²

²⁰ *The Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*, 5th Ed. (Detroit: The Lincoln Highway Association, 1924), 41, 412; *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association*, 29.

²¹ *Mohawk-Hobbs Grade and Surface Guide: Custer Battlefield Hiway, The A-Y-P Hiway* (Akron, OH: The Mohawk Rubber Company, 1927); Cynde Georgen, *In the Shadow of the Bighorns: A History of Early Sheridan and the Goose Creek Valley of Northern Wyoming* (Sheridan, WY: Sheridan County Historical Society, 2010), 80–81.

²² Whiteley, *The Yellowstone Highway*, 32–33.

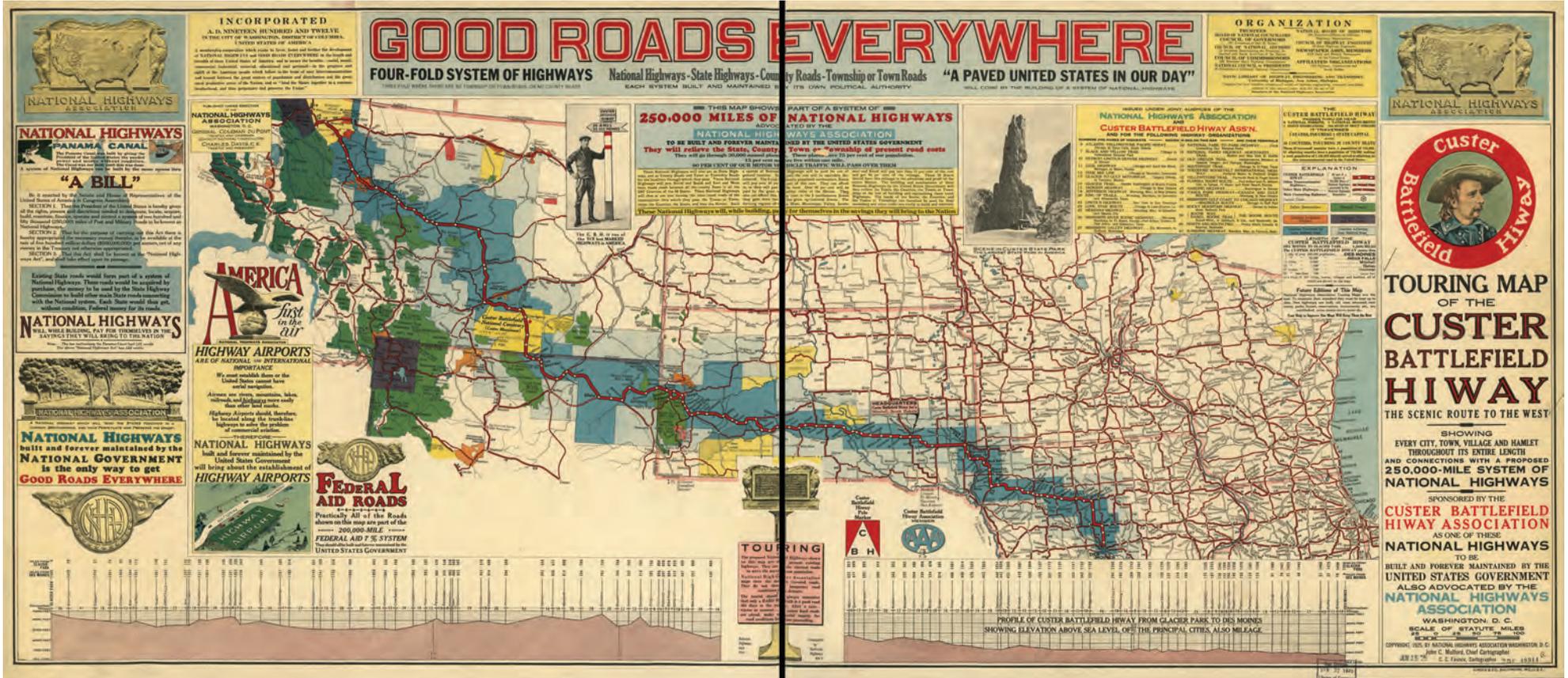


Figure 29. "Touring Map of the Custer Battlefield Hiway," 1925. This highway ran from Iowa to Montana, crossing the northwest corner of Wyoming. It utilized the Black and Yellow Trail from the South Dakota border to Gillette, then ran northwest through Sheridan County to Custer Battlefield in Montana. Credit: Library of Congress

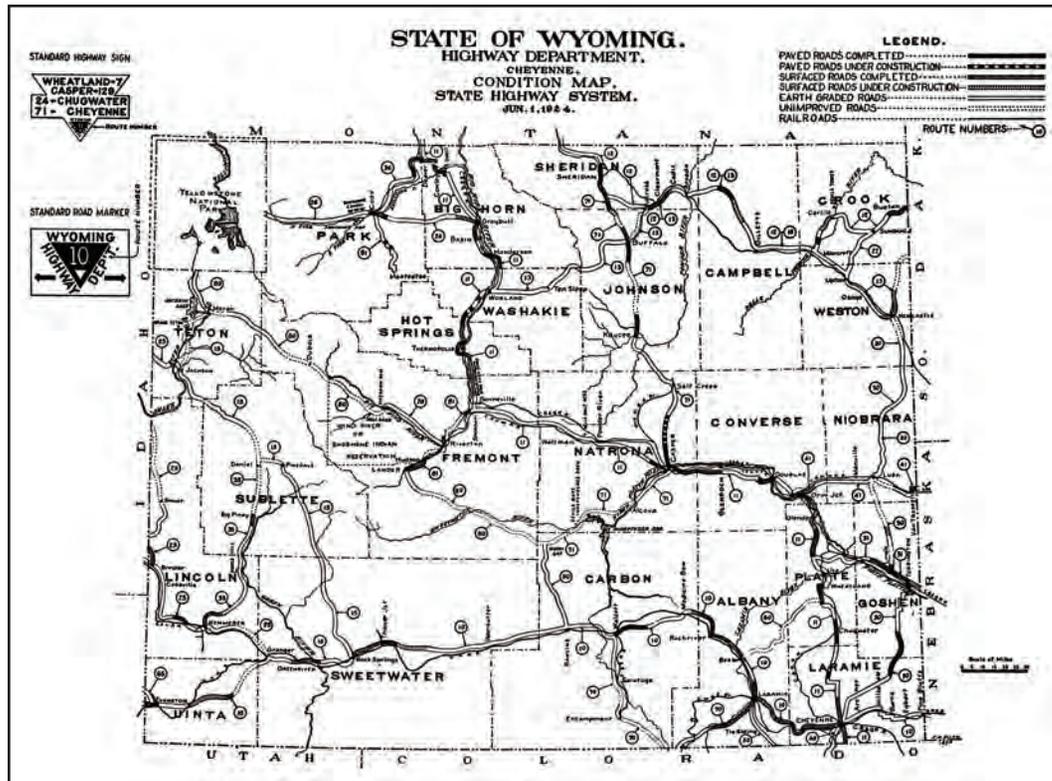


Figure 30. This condition map from 1924 shows the state of Wyoming's highways at the end of the named highway era. The 1924 *Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway* characterized the highway department's program of highway improvement as "ambitious." Credit: Frank H. Allyn Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Newspaper accounts of the 1910s suggest that booster clubs leaned heavily on county governments to make improvements to the highways, emphasizing the economic benefit of encouraging tourists to travel through local communities.²³ Boosters also petitioned state legislatures for road improvements and lobbied for federal involvement in highway construction. Because of a lack of reliable funding for road improvement, construction and maintenance of roads tended to happen in a piecemeal fashion. For example, in 1919 or 1920 the Wyoming Highway Department tractor-graded a seventeen-mile-long segment of the Black and Yellow Trail.²⁴ Some portions of the road that crossed Bighorn National Forest were constructed using federal money, sometimes with matching funds from the State.²⁵ Other sections of the road received little or no improvement. In 1924 the LHA reported that the highway department had embarked upon an "ambitious" program of highway improvement concentrated on the primary roads of the state (Figure 30), including five hundred thousand dollars spent on the improvement of seventy-seven miles of the Lincoln Highway in 1923. Moreover,

From Cheyenne west to Evanston, Wyoming, the Lincoln Highway tourist will encounter less than 40 miles of poor road and when it can be truthfully

²³ The Wyoming Newspaper Project, part of the Wyoming State Library Digital Collections, is an excellent source of information regarding the activities of local boosters, how they operated, and how their actions affected road development and improvement in the 1910s and 1920s. <http://newspapers.wyo.gov/>.

²⁴ Intermountain Antiquities Computer System Site Form, Site 48CA2785, the Black and Yellow Trail. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

²⁵ Wyoming Cultural Properties Form, Site 48JO1479, the Black and Yellow Trail. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

said that six or eight years ago the entire drive across the state was one very difficult to negotiate and likely, at times, to be almost impassable, some idea of the improvements accomplished will be gained.²⁶

Trail associations and other local boosters provided a valuable service to early motorists; however, the named highway system had a number of problems. For one, motorists could not be assured that the road advertised to them was truly the shortest, easiest, or best maintained road, especially if there was a competing route. As illustrated above, road improvement and maintenance were inconsistent and concentrated in some sections to the detriment of others. Between 1910 and 1920 the number of registered motor vehicles in the United States increased from five hundred thousand to nearly ten million, and increased again to twenty-six million by 1930. As the number of car owners and drivers continued to swell, it became clear the Federal Government would need to assist local and state governments in the creation of reliable routes and the construction of uniform highways.

The Federal Aid Highway Program commenced in 1916 with the passage of the Federal Aid Road Act. This landmark act was the first time the Federal Government provided assistance for state highway costs by granting funds

for any rural road over which the U.S. mail was carried. The act required states to have a highway department capable of designing, constructing, and maintaining these roads in order to be eligible to share in the appropriation. The Federal Highway Act of 1921 refined the scope of federal funding, limiting the amount of money that could be spent on local roads and emphasizing the importance of building roads that were “interstate in character.” As the Federal Government assumed greater responsibility for establishing a national network of roads, the need for auto trail boosters diminished.

In 1925 the Federal Government formed the Joint Board on Interstate Highways, which was charged with selecting a system of routes from among the named highways and designing a national system of signs and markers. Among other things, the board determined that the new system would have numbered routes rather than named—east-west routes were given even numbers and north-south routes odd. The standard U.S. route marker, which replaced the trail association insignias, became the shield and number system used today. During 1926 over one thousand U.S. markers were placed on 2,806 miles of U.S. Routes in Wyoming.²⁷

The basic routes of the three major named highways through Wyoming were all retained under the new

²⁶ *The Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*, 407–408.

²⁷ Weingroff, “From Names to Numbers”; Wyoming State Highway Commission, *Fifth Biennial Report, 1924–1926* (Cheyenne, 1926), RG 0045, Wyoming State Library, 39–41.



Left: Figure 31. This 1921 photograph of the Lincoln Highway through Granite Canyon shows a graded dirt road with some gravel surfacing.



Right: Figure 32. A photograph taken from the same vantage point circa 1930 shows U.S. Highway 30 after the application of an oil-aggregate mixture and a stripe dividing the highway into east- and west-bound lanes. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

numbered system and were designated as follows. The Lincoln Highway became U.S. Highway 30, dividing into north and south routes near Granger. US 30 North ran to Kemmerer and on to Pocatello, Idaho. US 30 South followed the path of the Lincoln Highway to Salt Lake City, Utah (Figure 2). The Black and Yellow Trail became U.S. Highway 16, running north from Gillette to Ucross

rather than south to Sussex. The Yellowstone Highway became U.S. Highway 87 between Cheyenne and Orin Junction and U.S. Highway 20 thereafter. In the 1920s the Wyoming Highway Department maintained roads by grading, providing drainage, and adding gravel surfacing to dirt roads. In 1924 the department began to experiment with oiling gravel roads (Figures 31–32). This oil-aggregate

mixture was an early form of “blacktop.” Because of the budding oil industry centered in Casper, black oil was abundant and cheap in Wyoming. By 1929 there were eighty-seven miles of oiled roads in Albany, Carbon, Goshen, and Natrona counties. Ten years later, every major road in Wyoming had received this treatment.²⁸

In the 1920s most of the U.S. Routes consisted of dirt roads lacking a constructed base or grade, with very little cut and fill. Minor cuts lowered some hills, and a few drainages were filled. Road profiles were slightly crowned to facilitate drainage. Road beds were about twenty-four feet wide, and right-of-way width was typically between sixty-six and eighty feet. Along the Lincoln Highway, horizontal realignments straightened short curves. As late as 1924 the LHA asserted, “Trans-state travel in Wyoming has not yet reached the density requiring permanent paving work and the fine, decomposed granite gravel grades constructed, provide all-weather conditions more than adequate to take care of the traffic volume of the present and immediate future.”²⁹

During the Great Depression the Civilian Conservation Corps undertook several road projects in Wyoming, building the Snake River Canyon Road in today’s Bridger-Teton National Forest and the roads through Guernsey

State Park. Federal aid highway projects boomed during the same period. The Wyoming Highway Department began major construction projects such as the realignment of U.S. Highway 30 between Medicine Bow and Walcott Junction, where nearly five miles were eliminated from the 1922 iteration of the Lincoln Highway. Reconstruction of the Yellowstone Highway between Cody and the east gate of the park took place between 1924 and 1938. Surfacing consisted of crushed gravel saturated with black oil.

By the 1930s roads began to approach modern engineering standards in order to accommodate traffic speeds up to seventy or eighty miles per hour and increased truck traffic. Accordingly, new rights-of-way were as much as two hundred feet wide. Subgrades as wide as thirty-six feet and composed of gravel fill were constructed to support heavier automobiles. Compacted road beds began to replace the dirt roads constructed in the 1920s. Many existing pipes, culverts, headwalls, guardrails, and fences were removed. Masonry was often used for retaining walls and culvert facings during new construction. Traveling surfaces were around sixteen to twenty-four feet wide for two lanes of traffic. Shoulders consisted of gravel or earth and sloped steeply to the bottom of borrow ditches. Increased speeds combined with these dramatic drop-offs likely contributed to the over one hundred traffic fatalities recorded in 1934.

²⁸ Wyoming State Highway Commission, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1926–1928* (Cheyenne, 1928), RG 0045, Wyoming State Library, 19-21; Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 424–425.

²⁹ Francis, “Historic Context and Evaluation of Automobile Roads in Wyoming”; *The Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*, 408.

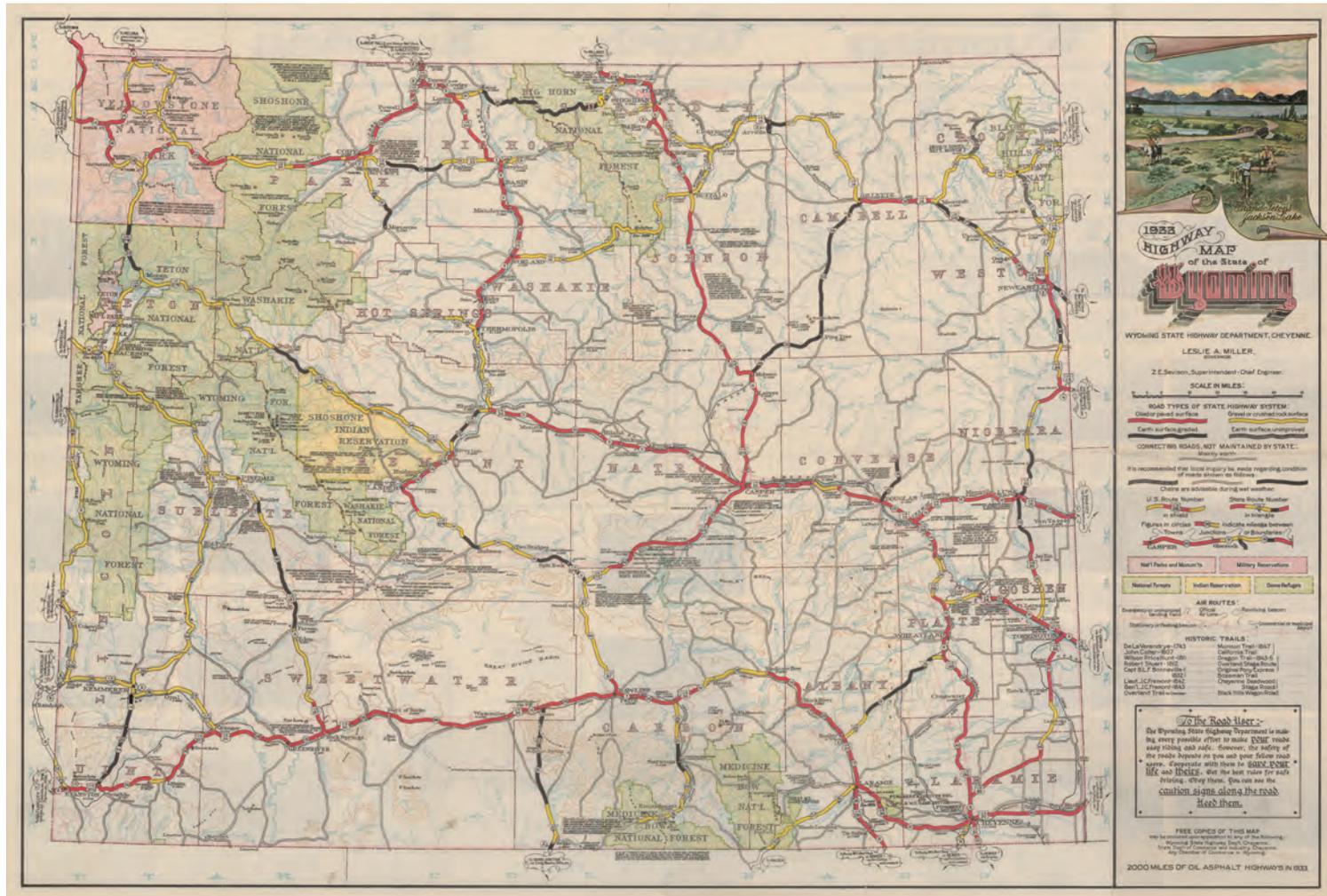


Figure 33. The 1933 Wyoming highway map color-coded road conditions within the state highway system. Red segments represented oiled or paved surfaces, yellow segments had gravel or crushed rock surfaces, and black segments were earth surfaces that had been graded. Grey segments indicated that these roads retained unimproved earth surfaces. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

Very little domestic road building took place during World War II while national resources were diverted to the war effort. After the war, highway construction responded to changes in the automobile industry, new federal standards, and a greater concern for safety. Horizontal line changes straightened curves for smoother travel and to allow improved sight distance for passing. Improvements to vertical alignments also increased sight distances. Passing lanes were added to many two-lane roads during the 1940s and 1950s, widening roads to forty-eight feet in these locations. Subgrades widened considerably: earth bases were often as wide as fifty-six feet and topped with gravel subgrades about forty-four feet wide. Fill slopes were significantly lessened. Asphalt, or “hot plant mix,” was introduced as a surfacing material. By the late 1940s and early 1950s a typical highway consisted of a paved, two-lane road having gentle gravel shoulders and a moderately steep embankment sloping to a borrow ditch.³⁰

World War II had deferred federal spending from infrastructure projects to the war effort; however, General and later President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s experiences in Germany during the war, specifically with the Autobahn, helped him to recognize that highways were a necessary component of a national defense system. As a young Lt. Colonel, Eisenhower had participated in a 1919 transcontinental motor convoy undertaken by the



Figure 34. This circa 1918 postcard depicts the Lincoln Highway at the intersection of West Cedar Street and Third Street in Rawlins. The highway through town consists of graded earth surface. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

U.S. Army and promoted by the LHA. The convoy left the White House on July 7 and headed for Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where it merged onto the Lincoln Highway and followed it to San Francisco, California, arriving on September 5. The convoy demonstrated that existing bridges and roads across the nation were entirely inadequate

³⁰ Francis, “Historic Context and Evaluation of Automobile Roads in Wyoming.”



Figure 35. This circa 1935 aerial photograph of Rawlins looks east along U.S. Highway 30, or West Spruce Street. The highway has been paved, whereas city streets in the foreground have earth surfaces. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

to sustain a large number of heavy vehicles, and thus a threat to national defense. In total, the passage of the convoy required nearly one hundred bridges to be rebuilt

or reinforced, forty-seven of which were encountered between Cheyenne and Evanston. Eisenhower recalled the experience in his autobiography *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends*, writing: “The old convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land.” President Eisenhower announced a “Grand Plan” for highways in 1954. During his administration the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 authorized a new Interstate Highway System of superhighways that in many places replaced the U.S. Routes.³¹

In Wyoming Interstate 80 followed basically the same route as the Lincoln Highway and U.S. Highway 30 South, the major difference being the route between Laramie and Rawlins. Interstate 80 was constructed between 1956 and 1976 and was routed close enough to US 30 that many towns along the older corridor were not entirely left behind. Exceptions include Bosler, Rock River, and Medicine Bow north of Laramie, and the original site of Little America, which in 1952 moved south to the future interstate corridor and was eventually given its own interstate interchange. Little America was originally sited near the town of Granger along a portion of the Mormon pioneer trail to Salt Lake City. Interstate 25 superseded U.S. Highway 87 and the Yellowstone Highway between

³¹ Weingroff, “The Lincoln Highway”; Lincoln Highway Association, *The Lincoln Highway: The Story of a Crusade that Made Transportation History* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935), 111; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 166–167.

Cheyenne and Casper, and Interstate 90 covered a similar route to the Black and Yellow Trail to Buffalo and the Custer Battlefield Highway.

In the early 1960s the completion of Interstate 90 across the northeast corner of Wyoming helped to maintain a direct route to the national parks through Wyoming, even though it conveyed tourists only as far as Sheridan or Buffalo.³² Travel routes through north central Wyoming were hotly contested as the tourist economy was recognized to be a significant contributor to the economic vitality of communities on the main leisure travel routes. Two U.S. Routes crossed the Bighorn Mountains: U.S. Highway 14, the northern route west from Sheridan, and U.S. Highway 16, which crossed the mountains southwest of Buffalo. These U.S. Routes divided at Ucross at a point where Sheridan and Buffalo competed vigorously for the tourist trade. During the late 1950s US 16 was improved to eliminate a narrow stretch of road through Tensleep Canyon, shortening the travel time between Buffalo and Worland and enhancing the route's appeal to tourists. As the interstate highway system developed, residents of Sheridan protested a plan to construct a route west from Gillette to Buffalo to connect with US 16. Governor Milward Simpson was called upon to settle the issue. Ultimately it was decided that routing Interstate 90 from



Figure 36. This west-facing postcard in circulation in 1962 depicts a wide, asphalt-paved US 30/West Spruce Street through Rawlins complete with lighted median. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

³² The completion of I-90 also appears to have had a significant effect on visitation to Devils Tower National Monument. Visitation to the monument increased notably from 2,159 visitors (at the time, a record number) in 1963 to around 127,500 visitors in 1965. These numbers were reported in *Wyoming Motel News* 5 (January 1966): 10.

Gillette to Buffalo would keep most of the traffic to the national parks in Wyoming, rather than lose much of it to a parallel route in Montana.³³ The section of Interstate 90 between Gillette and Buffalo officially opened in 1962, though work continued for a few additional years.

Interstate 25 funneled travelers driving north on the east side of the Rocky Mountains to U.S. Highways 20/26, Cody, and the east entrance of Yellowstone National Park, while Interstate 80 brought transcontinental or regional travelers to routes heading north to Jackson Hole, Grand Teton National Park, and Yellowstone. Towns and communities along these routes experienced a continued increase in travelers and in demand for services. Interstate highways reinforced existing travel patterns in Wyoming in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than introduce significantly different ones. This relates to a long-standing pattern in Wyoming in which infrastructure tends to develop within transportation corridors, where multiple routes share essentially the same space. The most compelling reason for this phenomenon seems to be that there are only a few safe, efficient ways to cross the challenging mountainous terrain and arid basins within the state. Nationally, the rise of interstate travel had the effect of concentrating tourist services in larger cities at the expense of small town businesses. While this was likely true in Wyoming in a

limited sense, the state has only a small number of large towns spaced over long distances, meaning that tourist services in smaller towns remained the only convenient options along many routes.

A traffic flow map prepared by the Wyoming Highway Department for 1957 indicated that US 30 was by far the most heavily traveled route in Wyoming. The differentiation of in-state and out-state automobiles indicated that roughly one-half of the traffic was “transcontinental” or out-of-state in origin. US 87, at the time the major north-south route between Cheyenne and Sheridan, was the second-most busy road in Wyoming. During the late 1950s the volume of traffic entering Yellowstone National Park through the east and south gates was approximately the same.

The traffic flow map of 1966 indicated that Interstate 80 was the most heavily traveled route in the state, just as US 30 had been. Between 1956 and 1966 the number of visitors to Yellowstone National Park increased steadily year by year, adding nearly seven hundred thousand additional visitors at the end of ten years. Many of these tourists drove through Wyoming. Traffic over US 16 nearly doubled after Interstate 90 was opened between Gillette and Buffalo. The volume of traffic on the parallel US 14

³³ Frank Hicks, “Interstate Route Means Great Deal to Buffalo,” *Wyoming State Tribune and Wyoming Eagle* (Cheyenne, WY), July 22–25, 1958; Robert W. Fenwick, “The Second Battle of the Little Big Horn,” *Denver Post Empire Magazine*, July 21, 1957. Both articles clipped in Highways vertical file, Wyoming State Archives.

also increased noticeably. The number of vehicles on the road between Cheyenne and Casper along Interstate 25 also grew significantly between 1958 and 1966. Traffic between Jackson and the south entrance to Yellowstone was heavier than that on the highway between Cody and the east entrance to the park and seems to have reflected growing numbers of visitors to Grand Teton National Park.³⁴

Because the interstate system was designed for maximum speed and efficiency, it does not run through communities, but near them. Interstates eliminate head-on traffic and limit traffic movement to the right, enhancing free flow. A system of highway interchanges allows drivers to enter and exit at defined points (Figures 37–38). This is in contrast to the moderate speeds of the named and numbered highways, where drivers could enter and exit the road at almost any point with relative ease and safety. The named and numbered highways allowed business owners to erect roadside services wherever they owned land or where it was for sale. The abundance of land on either side of the named highways and U.S. Routes meant that land was fairly cheap. As a result, roadside businesses were often generously spaced from one another and could be sprawling in sparsely populated states like Wyoming. The defined entrance and exit points mandated by interstate interchanges, however, concentrate roadside services in certain locations, driving



Figure 37. Fifth Street Interchange on Interstate 90 in Sheridan, 1971. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

³⁴ Wyoming State Highway Commission, *Twenty-First Biennial Report, 1956–1958* (Cheyenne, 1958), RG 0045, Wyoming State Library, 50–51; Wyoming State Highway Commission, *Twenty-Fifth Biennial Report, 1964–1966* (Cheyenne, 1966), RG 0045, Wyoming State Library, 69.

up the value of land at these locations and encouraging business owners to build up rather than out. In particular, the interstate interchange system has had a direct effect nationwide on how lodging properties are constructed.

Figure 38. Interstate 25 crossing West Lincolnway in Cheyenne near Little America, 1976. Interstate 80 extends northwest of Little America. The highway interchange system limited where cars could enter and exit the flow of traffic and over time concentrated roadside services at these points. Credit: Wyoming State Archives



The Development of Auto Tourism in Wyoming, 1913–1975

Tourists have had an economic presence in Wyoming since the late nineteenth century, first as leisure travelers arriving by train and then, beginning in the early twentieth century, by car. Particularly in the northwest portion of the state, automobile travel ensured that tourists were spending money in Wyoming communities, whereas rail travel had primarily funneled visitors to Yellowstone National Park through Montana. Newspaper accounts from the 1910s and 1920s reveal that auto trail associations and other local boosters of the named highways constantly reinforced the importance of capturing the tourist dollar of visitors in route to Yellowstone, or on a coast-to-coast tour crossing southern Wyoming. For example, a leader in the trail association for the Chicago, Black Hills, and Yellowstone Park Highway (i.e., the Black and Yellow Trail) argued that the trail association should be diligent in giving wide publicity to the merits of the route, claiming, “By so doing the association can attract over its highway the great bulk of the vast automobile touring traffic. Procuring this traffic will render returns to the association and the cities and municipalities making up the association, beyond prediction.”³⁵

³⁵ “Black and Yellow Trail Meritorious,” *Crook County Monitor* (Sundance, WY), October 16, 1913, <http://newspapers.wyo.gov/>.



Figure 39. Well-dressed auto tourists at Sherman Summit, circa 1920. Credit: Russell Rein, private collection

Historian Marguerite S. Shaffer describes early motorists along the first national highways as “a relatively homogenous community of upper- and middle-class, urban, white Americans,” explaining, “Although occasionally auto tourists met up with traveling salesmen, migrant workers, and tramps, automobile touring took time and money. During the late teens and the early twenties it was a pastime enjoyed by a select few of the upper and upper-middle class” (Figures 39–40). Shaffer estimates that in 1921 twenty thousand motorists, or 0.02 percent of the American population, made transcontinental auto tours. The cost of purchasing an automobile and needed supplies for the journey was certainly an obstacle for many Americans. Once in route, a month-long tour could conceivably cost one hundred and fifty dollars per person, or roughly 10 percent of a clerical worker’s annual salary of fifteen hundred dollars.³⁶ An equally significant obstacle was the rarity of paid vacation leave for both salaried workers and wage earners in the early twentieth century.

Before the final years of the Great Depression, the majority of American workers had neither the discretionary income nor the leisure time to be tourists. Until the 1920s the idea of vacation was of little concern to middle- or working-class Americans, for whom extended periods of time off connoted unemployment rather than earned leisure. During the late nineteenth century industrial wage earners began

to advocate for better working conditions, focusing on obtaining eight-hour workdays, five-day work weeks, and higher wages. At this time white-collar employees and wage earners were rarely given paid vacation, which was reserved for high-level executives and managers. An additional one-third of Americans were engaged in agricultural work that tied them to a farm or ranch and limited their ability to travel.

In the early twentieth century progressive management experts began to suggest that leisure, and especially vacation, was essential to restoring the vitality of those salaried, white-collar workers depleted by the unnatural stresses of desk work in the industrial age. While physical work was considered healthy and appropriate to a man’s nature, the mental labor undertaken by a growing number of white-collar workers taxed the brain beyond what was held to be natural. Yearly vacations with pay, the experts argued, would allow white-collar workers to engage in physical activity and recuperate from mental strain, thus enhancing their productivity throughout the remainder of the year. Ultimately, the cumulative effect of vacations taken by individual workers would improve the social health of the entire American middle class. By 1920 nearly 40 percent of all white-collar workers received annual vacations with pay, a statistic that would more than double to 80 percent within the decade.

³⁶ Marguerite S. Shaffer, “Seeing America First: The Search for Identity in the Tourist Landscape,” in *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*, ed. David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 174–175, 190.

Somewhere West of Laramie

SOMEWHERE west of Laramie there's a broncho-busting, steer-roping girl who knows what I'm talking about. She can tell what a sassy pony, that's a cross between greased lightning and the place where it hits, can do with eleven hundred pounds of steel and action when he's going high, wide and handsome.

The truth is—the Jordan Playboy was built for her.

JORDAN
 JORDAN MOTOR CAR COMPANY, Inc., Cleveland, Ohio

During the early twentieth century employers and management experts alike considered manual labor to be far less taxing than mental labor, and working-class employees, by extension, were thought to have less need for vacations to revitalize their productivity. In 1920 fewer than 5 percent of non-salaried employees received vacation time with pay. Advocates for extended time off for wage earners argued that vacations increased productivity, efficiency, and health, but also noted that vacations would enhance company loyalty among workers, decrease labor turnover, diminish workplace conflict, and lessen worker interest in unions. Although very little change occurred in the prosperous 1920s, the financial and social crises of the 1930s reinforced managements' desire to win employee loyalty in an attempt to forestall union organization. By the eve of World War II

Figure 40. In 1923 the Jordan Motor Car Company began producing advertisements for its Playboy model under the tag "Somewhere West of Laramie." Artist Fred Cole drew a cloche hat-wearing flapper racing a cowboy through the clouds. The ad is now recognized as one of the first to rely entirely on emotional appeal rather than the practical specifications of the car. The advertisement also illustrates that transcontinental travel was still predominantly the pastime of wealthy Americans and hints at romantic ideas about the West that would be increasingly important to tourists over the mid-twentieth century. Public domain

a majority of American wage earners, as well as 95 percent of salaried workers, had achieved yearly vacations with pay. Twenty-five million workers received paid leave, and sixty million Americans enjoyed at least a week's vacation away from home.³⁷

A number of factors, both practical and ideological, combined to create significant social changes in the average American's approach to leisure and vacation in the late 1930s and after World War II. The phenomenon of mass tourism is most often associated with unprecedented prosperity in postwar America; however, historian Michael Berkowitz notes that vacation expenditures rose steadily not only during the boom years of the 1920s, but also over the first six years of the Great Depression.³⁸ This suggests that material prosperity was not the only factor, or even the most significant factor, in establishing regular vacations as an important element of twentieth-century American culture. Practical considerations include not only higher wages and paid vacation leave, but also the development of a system of improved national highways and the affordability of mass-produced automobiles. The American Industrial Revolution, beginning around 1880, created a demographic shift that reshaped the character of the nation from a largely agrarian population

to an increasingly urban population having the capacity to step away from industrial labor for one or two weeks of leisure in a way that agricultural workers could not. During World War II a large segment of the American population traveled away from home, often overseas, as part of the war effort. Many of these Americans found travel to be a profound experience that shaped their enthusiasm to see different parts of the world.³⁹

Tourism became part of the American character. Berkowitz notes that by the end of the New Deal, "mass consumption of leisure, especially in the form of vacations and tourism, was [perceived to be] a necessity for the social, cultural, and economic health of the nation." The policies of the New Deal promoted new consumer practices, including tourism, in an effort to revitalize the national economy. Business leaders and government officials at national and local levels increasingly boosted the benefits of tourism and the attractions available in specific states and regions of the country, ultimately creating national interest in travel that extended beyond the upper- and upper-middle class Americans who had been the leisure passengers on the railroads and the early motorists. Nascent tourism promotion organizations had the task of educating Americans about the desirability of travel away from

³⁷ Michael Berkowitz, "A 'New Deal' for Leisure: Making Mass Tourism during the Great Depression," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 187–193.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁹ Berkowitz, "A 'New Deal' for Leisure," 193–194; Karen Dubinsky, "'Everybody Likes Canadians': Canadians, Americans, and the Post-World War II Travel Boom," in *Being Elsewhere*, 324–325.

home. Employers saw little benefit in paying vacation leave only to have workers sit at home for a week or more, as the rejuvenative effect of vacation time was believed to be tied to travel. As auto roads proliferated across the nation, opening more corners of America to outsiders, local boosters promoted the attributes that made their communities worthy destinations. Berkowitz writes,

Wherever a literate person turned during the 1930s, he or she was bombarded with professionally designed images and copy promoting the advantages of two-week vacation opportunities, vacation bargains, and all-in-one destinations. Although no one image or cleverly phrased slogan brought a tourist to a particular region, the aggregate effect of such advertising had created a cultural climate in which tourism could become increasingly accepted as a psychic necessity. More than advertising a particular product, community tourism had advertised a particular way of life.⁴⁰

Nationwide, millions of Americans began to consider tourism definitive of the American character. While widespread changes in employee compensation and developments in infrastructure and technology made travel possible, decades of intensive advertising and consumer education by tourism promotion organizations made travel



desirable. Slogans like “See America First” contributed to evolving ideas about American identity and nationhood. Tourism promoters cast travel as a patriotic ritual of citizenship, transforming an increasingly diverse nation into a unified group of consumers in search of a shared sacred landscape. The prevailing attitude of the time was that Americans were made better citizens through travel that revealed new aspects of their own country.⁴¹

While reshaping the cultural life of Americans, tourism promotion organizations simultaneously created a

Figure 41. The Lincoln Highway road guides advised auto tourists on the best feeder routes from the highway to Jackson Hole. Photograph circa 1920. Credit: University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, Lincoln Highway Digital Image Collection

⁴⁰ Berkowitz, “A ‘New Deal’ for Leisure,” 187, 193–194, 200.

⁴¹ Shaffer, “Seeing America First.”

Figure 42. Following World War II Wyoming experienced unprecedented growth in auto tourism. These women were photographed at the original Little America on U.S. Highway 30 North in the late 1940s. Credit: Russell Rein, private collection



commercialized, profit-driven industry of enormous economic power. On the eve of World War II, tourism was one of the largest industries in the nation, as large as automobiles, petroleum, and lumber combined, and 50 percent larger than iron and steel production. More than five million Americans were employed in the tourist industry. Capital investment in travel had reached thirty billion dollars, and travel expenditures of over six billion dollars a year accounted for close to 8 percent of national purchasing power. Nationally, tourism promoters spent \$6.5 million a year on advertising.⁴² In Wyoming, tourism promotion efforts were centralized in Cheyenne within a state agency called the Department of Commerce and Industry.⁴³ The character of Wyoming was particularly well-suited to the consumer desires of the day. Shaffer notes that tourists were looking for the “real America” often encapsulated in idealized images of the West: “The West became the antithesis of the northeastern industrial core. Tourists associated it with democracy, freedom, friendliness, and community. They saw only a land of farmers, ranchers, cowboys, and friendly Indians—people who lived close to the land.”⁴⁴ Accordingly, Wyoming experienced an incredible influx of tourists during the mid-twentieth century whose needs and demands shaped the commercial landscape along the major named and numbered highways in the state.

In 1927 the Wyoming State Legislature established the Department of Commerce and Industry. This department oversaw tourism as part of its responsibility to publicize Wyoming and its products in addition to what was then the department’s

⁴² Berkowitz, “A ‘New Deal’ for Leisure,” 194, 205–206.

⁴³ The railroads, and later the Federal Government in various partnerships, heavily promoted tourism to Yellowstone National Park but did not include the wider state. For more information on the promotion of Yellowstone and other parks, see Peter Blodgett, “Selling the Scenery: Advertising and the National Parks, 1916–1933,” in *Seeing and Being Seen* and Berkowitz, “A ‘New Deal’ for Leisure,” 200–205.

⁴⁴ Shaffer, “Seeing America First,” 175.

main concern of colonizing the Riverton and Willwood Federal Irrigation Projects.⁴⁵ An early department publication promoted the natural resources, markets, crop yields, weather, highways, and schools of Wyoming before concluding with this section on recreation:

Wyoming offers you:

Good roads and wonderful mountain scenery.

Vast forests and beautiful valleys.

Wild flowers in great profusion (only two states have a greater variety).

Thousands of miles of fine trout streams.

The greatest big game country in the United States.

The largest hot springs in the world (Thermopolis)—temperature 135°

Fahrenheit—flow, 20 million gallons daily.

Yellowstone National Park (2,142,720 acres), the most marvelous of Uncle Sam's many National Parks. 187,807 tourists visited the Park in 1926.

Splendid hotels, summer resorts and ranches throughout the State.⁴⁶

Although this list of offerings was doubtless intended to promote settlement in the sparsely populated state as well as tourism, it established many of the images and destinations

that the Department of Commerce and Industry and its successor agencies would continue to market to tourists throughout the historic period covered in this context, and that the Wyoming Office of Tourism continues to use today.

In 1933 the Department of Commerce and Industry prepared its first biennial report for the Wyoming Legislature. Executive Manager Charles B. Stafford reported that the department responded to around twelve thousand personal letters from people seeking information about travel in Wyoming. The department maintained a repository of photographs suitable for publication in national magazines and newspapers and a library of 16mm films that it distributed nationally. Using the tag line “Wyoming—Worth Knowing” it produced and distributed twenty-five thousand folders, fifty thousand automobile window stickers, and ten thousand brochures, as well as distributed around twenty-five thousand official highway maps. The department also made available a gummed sticker suitable to affix to envelopes or letterhead advertising “Wonderful Wyoming, The Vacationist's Paradise, Smooth, Resilient Oiled Gravel Roads.”⁴⁷ By the beginning of the 1930s the Department of Commerce and Industry had already assumed many of the functions carried out by the State's tourism arm through the end of

⁴⁵ Department of Commerce and Industry, *Special Biennial Report to the Twenty-Second Regular Legislative Session, April 1, 1931 to January 1, 1933* (Cheyenne, 1933), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library.

⁴⁶ Department of Commerce and Industry, “Wyoming” (Cheyenne, 1927), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library.

⁴⁷ Department of Commerce and Industry, *Special Biennial Report to the Twenty-Second Regular Legislative Session*, 17–20.



Figure 43. The Paint-Brush Map of Wyoming was first produced in the late 1930s and distributed until the early 1950s. This stylized state map presented a cartoon version of historic and cultural offerings around Wyoming. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

the period covered by this context. The biennial reports prepared between 1931 and the onset of World War II indicate that department personnel responded to some seventy-five thousand personal letters from potential travelers seeking information about Wyoming, and because the data is incomplete for all years within the ten-year window, the actual number of requests and responses is

likely significantly higher. Many letter writers requested travel literature. In 1939 the most popular query was for the official highway map, followed in order of decreasing popularity by informational pamphlets on Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, camping in Wyoming's national forests, rodeos and other outdoor Western-themed shows, dude ranches and resorts, hot springs, and the Sun Dances of the Plains tribes.

Many Americans were prompted to write the Department of Commerce and Industry through national advertising campaigns in leading magazines and newspapers. In the 1930s and early 1940s the department purchased ad space in *Sports Afield*, *American Forests*, *Outdoor Life*, *Field & Stream*, *Spur*, *Newsweek*, *Travel*, *Life*, and *Rocky Mountain Motorist*, among others. In addition, newspapers in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Kansas City ran ads for travel in Wyoming. The department proactively mailed its literature to American Automobile Association (AAA) affiliates, independent auto clubs, commercial organizations that maintained a tourist bureau, tourist and travel bureaus operated by daily newspapers, and life insurance companies. In 1940 the department distributed sixty tons of travel literature to such organizations, including all public libraries in the nation serving urban populations of five thousand or more. It produced and circulated 16mm films of the state to a similar group of interested parties.

In the late 1930s the department launched several special campaigns and events. In addition to maintaining a repository of photographs of the state that were distributed on request to the media, the department provided twelve-foot enlargements of photographs of the Jackson Hole elk herd to go on permanent display in railroad stations in Chicago and New York City. It built sixteen “Wonderful Wyoming” signs strategically set between North Platte and Big Spring, Nebraska, on U.S. Highway 30. Fifty thousand “Wonderful Wyoming” windshield and baggage stickers were distributed in 1937, and in 1938 the department produced and distributed 435 thousand windshield stickers that commemorated the approaching fifty-year anniversary of Wyoming statehood. On May 30, 1938 Governor Leslie A. Miller welcomed the world to visit Wyoming via an international radio broadcast.⁴⁸

The Department of Commerce and Industry claimed that in 1938 the average visitor to Wyoming stayed six-and-a-half days, an increase of four days over data from 1934. Increasing the average length of stay was one of the most important tasks of the department in order to reap the full benefit of the tourist dollar to the lodging, automobile, and food industries. The department asserted,

This substantial increase in the average length of stay of the motor tourist is largely due to the fact that in recent years we have obtained such broad distribution beyond our State borders of the pictorial tabloid, “Wonderful Wyoming,” and of the official state highway map, together with other supplemental literature, that many tourists have studied these publications before coming into the State and have planned their trips through the State in such manner as to permit visiting a maximum number of the scenic beauty spots, recreational areas and places of historical interest, thus prolonging their stay.⁴⁹

The department also claimed that the expenditures of travelers in Wyoming, both those for whom Wyoming was a destination and those who were traveling through the state, totaled more than fifteen million dollars in 1938, a value of \$67 per capita to the residents of the state.

Transcontinental travel was found to have a value of six million dollars in Wyoming, more than four million of which was accrued along U.S. Highway 30. Wyoming hosted more than one million travelers—five times the population of the state—in 357 thousand automobiles

⁴⁸ Department of Commerce and Industry, *Special Biennial Report to the Twenty-Second Regular Legislative Session*; Department of Commerce and Industry, *Special Biennial Report to the Twenty-Fifth Legislature, April 1, 1937 to January 1, 1939* (Cheyenne, 1939), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library, 3, 8–9, 18–21, 25–28; Department of Commerce and Industry, *Report of Activities, 1939–1940* (Cheyenne, 1940), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library, 2, 6–7.

⁴⁹ Department of Commerce and Industry, *Special Biennial Report to the Twenty-Fifth Legislature*, 13.

during this year, and nearly 60 percent of these autos crossed US 30. At Yellowstone National Park, long considered a bellwether for tourism in Wyoming,⁵⁰ visitation increased from just over two hundred thousand in 1927 to 466 thousand in 1938. During this decade 3.2 million tourists, or more than fourteen times the resident population of Wyoming, visited the park. By 1938, 90 percent of automobiles in Yellowstone either entered or exited through a Wyoming gate, and the average tourist car using one of the Wyoming gates traveled seven hundred miles in Wyoming. Yellowstone tourists spent an estimated one million dollars on gasoline and five million dollars on food and lodging in Wyoming.⁵¹

In 1940 nearly 193 thousand out-of-state cars were counted at Wyoming ports of entry between June and September, beating the 1939 record of around 185 thousand cars during the same four months. The Department of Commerce and Industry extolled the value of “new money” from out-of-state visitors, claiming that tourism “does not deplete any resources of the State. We can use our scenery over and over again.” During the height of the 1940 tourist season Wyoming collected \$1.6 million in taxes on gasoline and \$231 thousand in sales tax on \$16.5 million spent on meals, lodging, and incidentals. The department conducted a

survey of visitors, to which two hundred automobile parties responded. The survey found that 76 percent of respondents patronized tourist camps, 17 percent hotels, resorts, and lodges, 4 percent national forest campgrounds, and 3 percent dude ranches. Visitation to Yellowstone increased 8 percent from 1939 and broke the half-million mark for the first time in park history.⁵²

The entry of the United States into World War II sharply curtailed what had been a dramatic increase in tourism to Wyoming from the late 1920s to the early 1940s. The Department of Industry and Commerce’s data report for 1942 states, “The tourist industry was all but given up because of war restrictions on transportation. Tourists visiting the state, as indicated by the Yellowstone National Park ‘yardstick’, dropped off as much as 70 per cent.” The department’s 1944 report of activities noted that the department had served as “a sort of a clearinghouse for many war activities,” while 1943 was the “smallest” travel year since 1929. In 1944—prior to the conclusion of the war—Yellowstone’s visitation data and returns on the gas tax indicated that travel to the park had increased by a third. Nearly eleven thousand servicemen visited Yellowstone, almost 13 percent of the park’s total visitation. During the war Yellowstone suspended its bus service and

⁵⁰ Wyoming’s national forests have also played an important role in attracting tourists to the state; however, because the national forests were frequently used by residents, often for day trips, usage data for the national forests is not as revealing of revenue generated from long-distance visitors in need of lodging and other roadside services.

⁵¹ Department of Commerce and Industry, *Special Biennial Report to the Twenty-Fifth Legislature*, 15–18.

⁵² Department of Commerce and Industry, *Report of Activities, 1939–1940*, 5, 12, 14.

offered only minimal accommodations. The park could not be accessed by air, bus, or rail, yet more than twenty-four thousand automobiles entered the park in 1944.⁵³

In 1946 the AAA stated, “The most significant reflection of post-war prosperity, will be in a tremendous increase in tourist traffic.” The editors of *Holiday* echoed this sentiment, writing,

In that yesterday before World War Two, vacations, with pay, for those who were so fortunate, usually meant a week or two away from job and housework. Only the minority could afford the time or the cost of going beyond a three or four hundred mile radius from home. But this is the post-war world, for which great sacrifices were made. This is the new world, in which vacations are the rule instead of the exception.⁵⁴

At the conclusion of the war the AAA predicted nearly half of American car owners would visit the West. A postwar increase in tourist-related traffic was clearly evident in Wyoming. The Department of Commerce and Industry’s 1946 *Report of Activities* concluded, “You could not have kept the tourists and visitors out of Wyoming this past year with a stone wall.”⁵⁵ The tourism industry in Wyoming benefited from America’s spirit of celebration following the war, but more specifically from a fascination in American popular culture with the West. Western films had been popular during the silent era before falling out of favor with the advent of sound. Westerns were relegated to pulp status for over a decade before several major studio productions in 1939

⁵³ Department of Commerce and Industry, “Wyoming’s Industries, 1942” (Cheyenne, 1942), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library; Department of Commerce and Industry, *Report of Activities, 1943–1944* (Cheyenne, 1944), RG 0286, Wyoming State Library, 2–4.

⁵⁴ Both quotations in Dubinsky, “Everybody Likes Canadians,” 322–324.

⁵⁵ Wyoming Department of Commerce and Industry, *Report of Activities, 1945–1946* (Cheyenne, 1946), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library, 6.

Figure 44. In the 1950s Wyoming was increasingly advertised as a destination for family vacations. Typical ads depicted a father, mother, and two children being entertained and educated on vacation in the state. This advertisement ran in *Holiday* in March 1958. Credit: Wyoming State Library

Figure 45. In the 1954 comic book produced by the Wyoming Commerce and Industry Commission, “Wyoming Joe” transports a family of four to the “New West.” Credit: Wyoming State Library



reinstated the genre’s popularity, which would not peak until the 1950s. Western radio dramas such as *The Lone Ranger* were also very popular between the 1930s and 1960s. When Americans began purchasing televisions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Western programs quickly became audience favorites. In 1959 twenty-six Westerns aired during primetime, and Westerns comprised almost one-quarter of television programming. Among the top ten television shows of the late 1950s were eight Westerns.⁵⁶

Around 1947 the Department of Commerce and Industry was reorganized as the Commerce and Industry Commission. The commission produced literature and national advertisements that relied more and more on popular ideas about the West. Whereas earlier tourism publications had featured dramatic photographs of mountains and other impressive vistas, thermal features, and big game animals, publications from the 1950s emphasized Wyoming’s suitability for family vacations, generally depicting a father, mother, and two children being entertained and educated on vacation in the state (Figure 44).⁵⁷ Prior to 1955 Western television programs and many radio programs and films of this genre were geared toward children, suggesting that parents considered children’s interests when planning family vacations. In 1952 and again in 1954 the commission released

⁵⁶ Susan Sessions Rugh, *Are We There Yet: The Golden Age of American Family Vacations* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 92–93; Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor, eds., *Hollywood’s West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

⁵⁷ Historian Hal K. Rothman notes that recreation tourism, travel involving physical experiences with the outdoors, was the dominant form of tourism between the 1920s and mid-1940s. Following World War II marketing strategies for western tourism shifted to entertainment tourism, which characterized the West as “a playground, the American dreamscape, historic, mythic, and actual . . .” and more closely approximated the West of popular culture. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 23–24.

comic books that depicted typical families of four touring the state. In the 1954 publication the family is magically transported to Wyoming by “Wyoming Joe,” a mounted cowboy who leaps from their television screen and offers to show them the “New West” (Figure 45).⁵⁸

Both comic books were well received within the tourism industry. The commission noted in 1952,

This year, a brand new and strikingly different publicity idea was used, utilizing one of the most popular mediums in existence today, the “comic book” type of magazine. This novel 16-page, full color publication on Wyoming has created much interest in Wyoming vacations and, in addition, has brought our state much publicity because of its uniqueness. The publication was written up in newspapers all over the country as well as in several national magazines, including *Time*.⁵⁹

This version of the comic won the Midwest Writers Association national award in 1953, influencing the commission’s decision to issue another “larger and more attractive” comic the following biennium.⁶⁰ In addition to the comics, other commission publications from this

era often relied on line drawings and other illustrations to convey popular ideas and conjure exotic destinations that had earlier been depicted through photographs. Concerned that Wyoming advertisements had no cohesive theme, in 1955 the commission approved the creation and use of “Cowpony Joe,” an anthropomorphic horse the agency hoped would aid readers in remembering the ad copy they had seen about Wyoming. Cowpony Joe, a “fiery-eyed waddie,” was intended to be a “modern-day version of Wyoming’s famed license plate bucking horse” who enjoyed Wyoming the way visitors would, fishing, taking photographs, and even riding another horse (Figure 46).⁶¹ Cowpony Joe’s lifespan appears to have been limited, as he is absent from the commission’s publications after 1958.

The daily activities of the Commerce and Industry Commission closely mirrored those of the prewar years. According to biennial reports from this era, commission staff received and responded to a large volume of personal letters requesting information about Wyoming. Many of these requests were accompanied by clippings from national magazines or newspapers in wide circulation. In the late 1940s and 1950s advertisements were frequently placed in magazines like *National Geographic*, *Field & Stream*, *Holiday*,

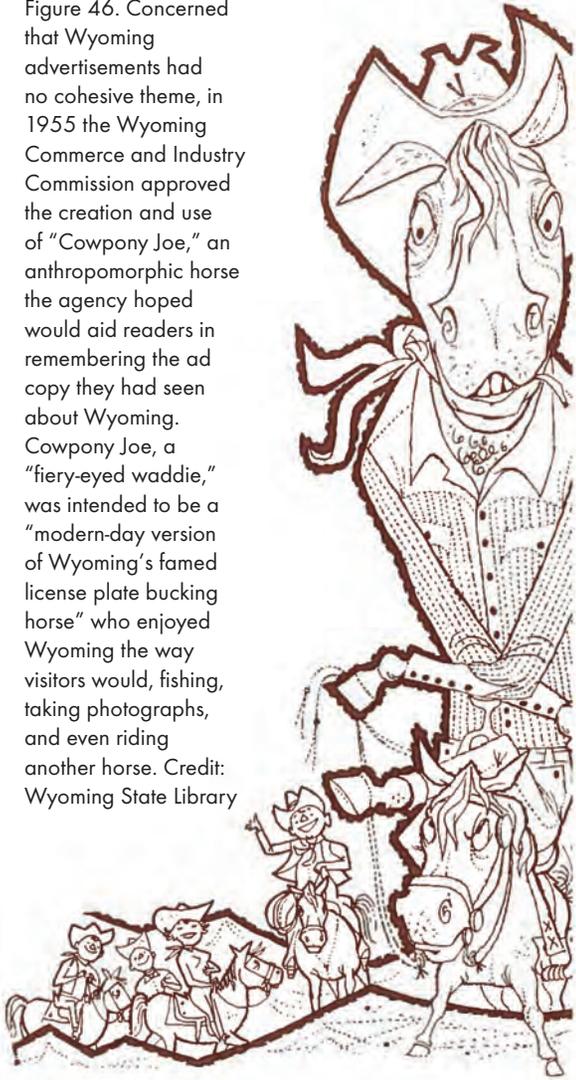
⁵⁸ Commerce and Industry Commission, *First Biennial Report, 1947–1948* (Cheyenne, 1948), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library; Commerce and Industry Commission, “Wonderful Wyoming” (Cheyenne, 1952), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library; Commerce and Industry Commission, “Wyoming: The Cowboy State” (Cheyenne, 1954), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library.

⁵⁹ Commerce and Industry Commission, *Third Biennial Report, 1951–1952* (Cheyenne, 1952), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library.

⁶⁰ Commerce and Industry Commission, *Fourth Biennial Report, 1953–1954* (Cheyenne, 1954), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library, 11.

⁶¹ Wyoming Travel Commission, *Fifth Biennial Report, 1955–1956* (Cheyenne, 1956), RG 0221, Wyoming State Library.

Figure 46. Concerned that Wyoming advertisements had no cohesive theme, in 1955 the Wyoming Commerce and Industry Commission approved the creation and use of “Cowpony Joe,” an anthropomorphic horse the agency hoped would aid readers in remembering the ad copy they had seen about Wyoming. Cowpony Joe, a “fiery-eyed waddie,” was intended to be a “modern-day version of Wyoming’s famed license plate bucking horse” who enjoyed Wyoming the way visitors would, fishing, taking photographs, and even riding another horse. Credit: Wyoming State Library



Newsweek, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Sunset*, and others. In a departure from prewar trends, advertisements were also purchased in women’s magazines such as *Mademoiselle*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and *House Beautiful*, perhaps indicating the increasing importance of family vacations to Wyoming.⁶² Magazine campaigns seem to have been very successful. The May 17, 1948 edition of *Time*, which included an ad for Wyoming vacations, hit newsstands on Friday, May 14. By Monday morning the commission had already received 273 inquiries based on this ad, while regular subscribers of *Time* had yet to receive their copies of the magazine in the mail.⁶³

During the postwar years commission staff began attending travel shows on a regular basis. These shows were typically located within the markets from which Wyoming was drawing the most visitors, the West Coast and Midwest, particularly the greater Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles metropolitan areas. States like Iowa, Ohio, Missouri, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were also large markets for Wyoming tourism. In the 1950s a greater emphasis was placed on drawing Texans to the state. Ad placement in newspapers also followed these lucrative markets.⁶⁴ The commission continued to produce photographs and 16mm film for distribution on request. Radio advertisements were aired in key markets such as Chicago. In 1953 the first “TV films” were produced. By 1956 nine Wyoming films had aired on television stations in Los Angeles, Detroit, and Cleveland, and two others were aired nationally by the National Broadcasting Company.⁶⁵

The commission published a variety of literature during the postwar years. The “Paint-Brush Map,” which had first appeared in the late 1930s, was very popular in the 1940s and in distribution at least through the early 1950s. This stylized state map presented a cartoon version of historic and cultural offerings around Wyoming. The tag line “Wonderful Wyoming” continued to be used on general informational material, as well as “Wyoming, Frontier for Fun” and “Wyoming, Wonderland of the

⁶² Karen Dubinsky has commented on the broader trend of advertising vacations to women during this time period, writing, “It was commonly held that, within families, women made the decision about where to travel.” Quoted from “Everybody Likes Canadians,” 323.

⁶³ Commerce and Industry Commission, *First Biennial Report*.

⁶⁴ Commerce and Industry Commission, *First Biennial Report*; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Second Biennial Report, 1949–1950* (Cheyenne, 1950) RG 0268, Wyoming State Library, 6; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Third Biennial Report*; Wyoming Travel Commission, *Fifth Biennial Report*.

⁶⁵ Commerce and Industry Commission, *Second Biennial Report*, 6; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Third Biennial Report*; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Fourth Biennial Report*, 7; Wyoming Travel Commission, *Fifth Biennial Report*.

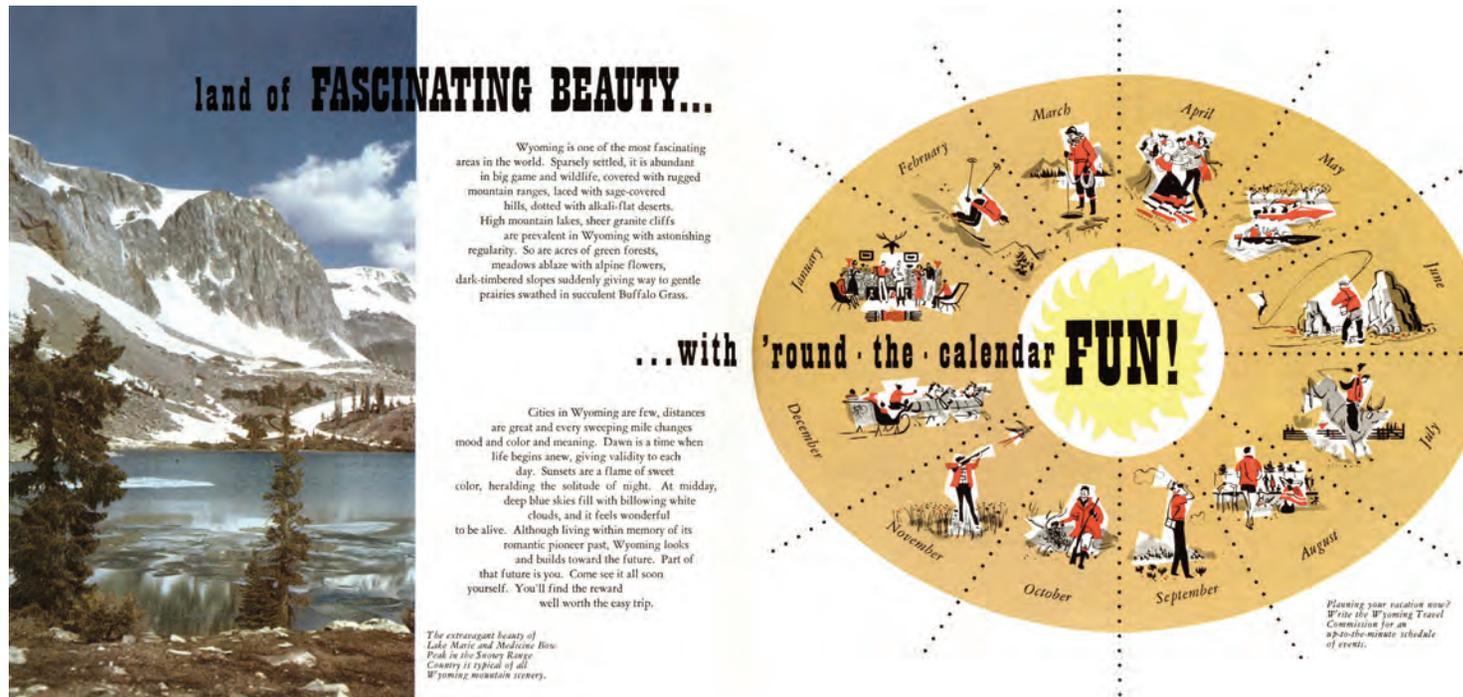


Figure 47. In the 1950s the Wyoming Commerce and Industry Commission became increasingly interested in promoting year-round tourism that included hunting and winter sports. The 1957 edition of *Wyoming Wonderland* includes this spread emphasizing activities enjoyed month-by-month. Credit: Wyoming State Library

West.” The commission also published directories for dude ranches, campgrounds, and motels in the state. 1950 saw the release of “Ski Wyoming,” a new publication describing fifteen downhill ski areas in the state, many of which were in the national forests. The 1939–1940 biennial report

had been the first to identify winter sports as a promising tourist opportunity for Wyoming, but World War II caused a setback in winter tourism development that only began to reverse in the 1950s (Figure 47).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Department of Commerce and Industry, “Paint-Brush Map” (Cheyenne, 1938), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Second Biennial Report*, 6; Department of Commerce and Industry, *Report of Activities, 1939–1940*, 21.

In 1948 the commission estimated that 1.3 million visitors left seventy-five million dollars in the state through the purchase of gas, oil, lodging, meals, and other items. Yellowstone alone attracted one million visitors, doubling the record of five hundred thousand visitors set in 1940. In 1947 and 1948, 283 thousand cars and 305 thousand cars entered the park, respectively. It seems likely that Yellowstone was not prepared to deal with this dramatic increase in visitation, because the park's numbers slumped by fifteen thousand in 1949 following complaints from the public regarding the condition of housing, eating, and sanitary facilities at the park. Despite the temporary decline at Yellowstone, Wyoming's highway officials anticipated a 10 to 15 percent increase in traffic in 1950. The commission claimed that Wyoming received over one hundred million dollars in interstate travel in 1951.⁶⁷

From 1950 to 1954 Wyoming hosted between two-and-a-half and three million visitors each year, with a rate of expenditures ranging from \$85.9 million to \$124.1 million. The average party spent around five days in the state. Yellowstone saw a little more than one million visitors each year. By the end of this five-year period Grand Teton National Park was also hosting one million visitors. The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission began reporting an increase in out-of-state hunting and fishing licenses

in the late 1940s. Between 1950 and 1954 out-of-state applications for antelope licenses more than tripled, deer licenses were in excess of five times the prior demand, and bear licenses nearly doubled. In 1956 three million tourists generated \$136 million for Wyoming, including \$33.9 million spent on food and beverages, \$26.2 million spent on gas, and \$35.5 million spent on accommodations.⁶⁸

During the biennium of 1957 and 1958, 6.8 million tourists visited Wyoming, twenty times the resident population of the state. Ninety-seven percent of these visitors traveled by car, staying on average between five and six days. During these two years approximately one out of every twenty-five Americans visited Wyoming. Wyoming residents enjoyed the largest per capita return on tourism in the nation, as the \$296.6 million spent by tourists yielded around nine hundred dollars per resident. Tourists spent \$80 million on food, \$62.2 million on lodging, and \$65.2 million on gas.⁶⁹

Steady growth in tourism during the 1950s proved that the travel boom predicted at the conclusion of World War II was realistic. Nationally, expenditures for all travel—both pleasure and business—more than doubled between 1950 and 1960. The travel industry in Wyoming was the third largest income producer for the state in 1960. Studies of the tourist industry in Wyoming completed during the late 1950s and early 1960s highlighted significant trends. One

⁶⁷ Commerce and Industry Commission, *First Biennial Report*; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Second Biennial Report*, 7; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Third Biennial Report*.

⁶⁸ Commerce and Industry Commission, *Fourth Biennial Report*, 6; Commerce and Industry Commission, *First Biennial Report*; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Third Biennial Report*.

⁶⁹ Wyoming Travel Commission, *Biennial Report, 1957–1958* (Cheyenne, 1958).

was the importance of the state's motels in the tourism economy. The 534 motels in Wyoming in 1961 offered 8,691 units. These businesses were concentrated in ten of the state's twenty-three counties. Over 25 percent of the motels were along U.S. Highway 30 and 34.5 percent of these businesses were located in the counties adjacent to Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks. Motels accounted for more than 50 percent of the tourism industry's gross receipts in 1958. During the previous four years motel lodging sales had increased by over 58 percent. Motor courts and motels were mainly small, owner-operated businesses. As a group, they were estimated to be the fourth largest employer and third largest industry in Wyoming. Out-of-state travelers preferred a roadside motel to a downtown hotel: over 80 percent of the motel business was from non-resident travelers, in contrast to only 65 percent of the state's hotel clientele. The Wyoming lodging industry was in line with broader trends. Nationally motels experienced an 86 percent gain between 1954 and 1958.⁷⁰

Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks were top destinations for vacation travelers. A study of the out-of-state tourist market listed eight different travel routes through Wyoming, and most of them included the national parks. In fact, 40 percent of Wyoming's tourists saw very little of the state other than the routes in and out of the two parks. A large proportion of tourists took a direct route to Yellowstone and Grand Teton, spent several days

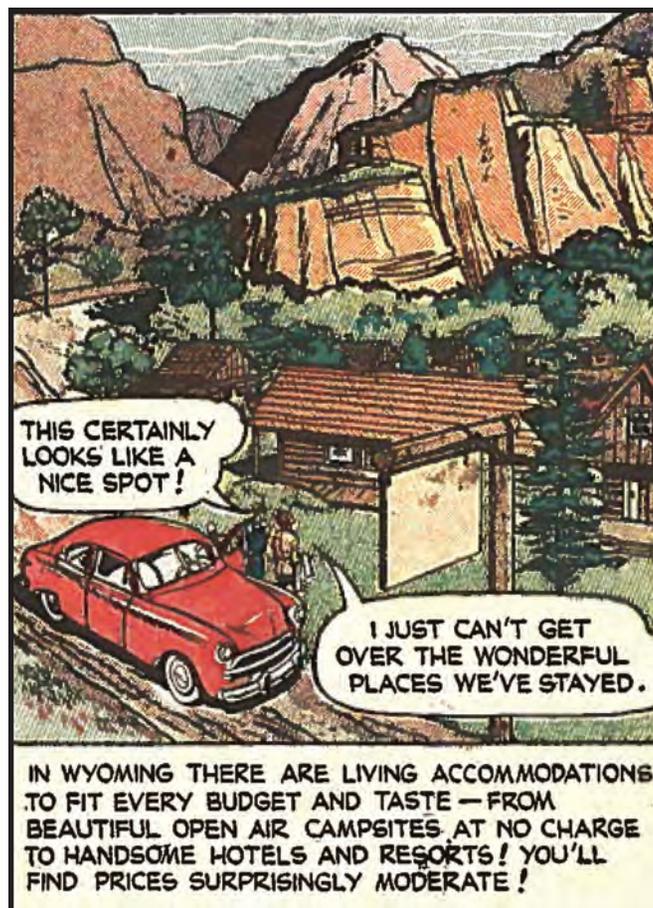


Figure 48. In the 1950s lodging properties were mainly small, owner-operated businesses. As a group, they were estimated to be the fourth largest employer and third largest industry in Wyoming. A 1952 comic book produced by the Wyoming Commerce and Industry Commission reassured American families that good-quality lodging was available throughout the state. Credit: Wyoming State Library

there, and then departed by the most direct route. Nearly 65 percent of the visitors to Wyoming spent at least one night in Yellowstone; 40 percent also spent the night in

⁷⁰ Robert F. Gwinner Jr., "An Analysis of the Travel Industry in the State of Wyoming," (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 1963), 105, 107, 110, 112.

Figure 49. In the early 1960s the Wyoming Travel Commission adopted a new slogan that remained in use at least until 1990. “Big Wyoming” emphasized the natural wonders of Wyoming through photographs of the state’s famous landmarks. This advertisement ran in major magazines in 1963.

Credit: Wyoming State Library

Do you know why
BIG wyoming
is America's most unforgettable vacation state?

Wyoming is storybook country! Here are surprises that make a Wyoming vacation relived after others are forgotten.

What's so special about the big country? Trace our winning-of-the-west history, still clearly to be seen (pioneer forts, battlegrounds, famous massacre sites, Indian arrowhead fields, the Overland, Oregon and other pioneer trails).

Come for the fighting trout—21 varieties—in high country lakes or streams. Come to camp in a choice of hundreds of campgrounds (some, even, with equipment rental, laundry, shower services). Come to visit famed Yellowstone, Grand Teton National Parks and numerous state parks. Come to see Indians and cowboys and pageantry and scenery. Come to fish, hunt, boat, swim, climb mountains—or stretch out under the biggest blue over!

Come any month for a vacation you can live—and relive. Make it a Wyoming year! We'll help you.

Did you know that in 1893 more than 50,000 overland pioneers stopped at Fort Laramie on their westward journey? To see Wyoming is to relive the opening of the west.

Did you know that fish and game are still as plentiful as a century ago; that there are 20,000 miles of streams and record-holding high country lakes?

Did you know that Wyoming is the Switzerland of America with some of the world's most majestic mountain scenery, as well as storied plains country?

Did you know that Wyoming offers every type of accommodation, from luxurious dude ranches to good, modestly priced motels and hotels?

Did you know that world-famed Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks plus numerous state parks offer incomparable sights, activities?

WYOMING TRAVEL COMMISSION
3228 Capitol Ave., Cheyenne, Wyo. 82001 • Dept. L

Gentlemen: Please help me make it a Wyoming vacation year. Send: Big Wyoming book (optional) Wyoming poster Tips for the Sheraton Accommodations Brochure.

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____

the Grand Teton and Bighorn regions. A third of the state’s visitors traveled more widely over more than eight days. The draw of Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks was paradoxical—it brought visitors to the state, but they traveled primarily on beelines to the parks. The challenge of getting tourists to stay longer in Wyoming remained a dominant one.⁷¹

In contrast to the rapid growth of tourism following World War II, the 1960s and 1970s saw steady visitation numbers and maturation in the tourism industry. In the early 1960s the recently renamed and restructured Wyoming Travel Commission adopted a new slogan—“This is Big Wyoming,” or simply “Big Wyoming”—that would remain in use at least until 1990. The “Big Wyoming” campaign marked a return to emphasizing the natural wonders of Wyoming through photographs of the state’s famous landmarks (Figure 49). Popular ideas about the West and Western history were less important during this period than awe-inspiring scenery and outdoor experiences. In the early 1960s the travel commission began offering tourist clinics for towns in Wyoming that served a large number of tourists. These clinics educated business owners on visitor expectations and coached them in how to meet customer demands.⁷²

⁷¹ Robert F. Gwinner Jr., *A Study of Wyoming's Out-of-State Tourist Market* (Laramie: University of Wyoming College of Commerce and Industry, Division of Business and Economic Research, 1962), 27–33, 54–55.

⁷² Wyoming Travel Commission, *Report to the People of Big Wyoming, 1963–1964* (Cheyenne, 1964), RG 0221, Wyoming State Library; Wyoming Travel Commission, *Report to the People of Big Wyoming, 1965–1967* (Cheyenne, 1967) RG 0221, Wyoming State Library.

The Wyoming Travel Commission maintained many of the daily activities of its predecessors. It purchased advertisements in *National Geographic*, *Life*, *Sports Afield*, *Sunset*, *Holiday*, *Field & Stream*, and numerous others, as well as newspapers and radio stations within its major markets in the West and Midwest. In April 1966 *National Geographic* carried “Wyoming: High, Wide, and Windy,” a forty-one-page article on the state. During the 1963–1964 biennium the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) aired three Wyoming events on network television. The travel commission began producing television commercials in 1970. Wyoming native Curt Gowdy featured outdoor recreation in the state on his ABC program *American Sportsman* in the early 1970s.⁷³

The commission continued to receive and respond to a voluminous correspondence, to maintain a library of photographs and 16mm film, and to attend travel shows in its major markets. Promotional literature during this period included a full-color vacation guide titled “This is Big Wyoming,” an accommodations directory, a camping directory, and a ski directory. The growing importance of winter tourism is evident in editorials published in *Wyoming Motel News* from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. The lodging community was hopeful about the possibility of turning towns like Jackson into year-round destinations. In 1970 the south entrance to Yellowstone National Park opened to snowmobiles for the first time. Other winter offerings included fourteen ski areas, snowmobiling in seven national forests, ice fishing, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and viewing the elk herd at the National Elk Refuge near Jackson.⁷⁴ The growing importance of snow sports merited a new travel commission

⁷³ Wyoming Travel Commission, *Report to the People of Big Wyoming, 1963–1964, 1965–1967*; Wyoming Travel Commission, *Report to the People of Big Wyoming, 1969–1971* (Cheyenne, 1971) RG 0221, Wyoming State Library; Wyoming Travel Commission, *Report to the People of Big Wyoming, 1971–1973* (Cheyenne, 1973) RG 0221, Wyoming State Library.

⁷⁴ *Wyoming Motel News* 5 (December 1965): 8, 12; WMN 5 (May 1966): 9; WMN 6 (February 1967): 1; WMN 7 (May 1967): 1; WMN 7 (April 1968): 1, 5; WMN 8 (May 1968): 1; WMN 8 (January 1969): 7; WMN 9 (December 1969): 6; WMN 10 (December 1970): 7.



Figure 50. The importance of winter sports in Wyoming grew steadily in the mid-1960s and 1970s. Many ski and snowmobile destinations were in the national parks and forests. This brochure for skiing in Medicine Bow National Forest combines the romance of the Western cowboy with the increasingly valuable attraction of winter sports. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

publication, “Winter Sports in Big Wyoming.” Another new publication was “Family Water Sports Guide to Big Wyoming.” In 1975 the commission began publishing “Afoot,” a guide to climbing and backpacking.⁷⁵

The pattern of steady numbers of tourists was altered by gasoline shortages and high prices as well as an inflation crisis and recession during 1973 and 1974. The cost of travel rose 15 percent in 1974 over the previous year.⁷⁶ Vacation travel was on the cusp of change throughout the United States by this time due to social factors. The children of the postwar baby boom were growing up and were not as willing to pack the family station wagon for

a vacation. Road trips with friends began to supplant the family vacation as the idealized way to travel. Those who continued to take driving vacations were more likely to travel to a specific destination, one close to home, and stay, in contrast to the long, constantly on the move, meandering car trips of the previous decades. While some families continued the tradition of a car trip to a national park, others chose to spend their time at a single destination resort. Travel advertising began to focus on niche marketing. While motels continued to serve recreational travelers, they increasingly relied on business travelers to be profitable.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Wyoming Travel Commission, *Report to the People of Big Wyoming, 1963–1964, 1965–1967, 1969–1971, 1971–1973*; Wyoming Travel Commission, “Afoot: Backpacking, Climbing Big Wyoming” (Cheyenne, 1975) RG 0221, Wyoming State Library.

⁷⁶ *Wyoming Motel News* 14 (February 1974): 5; WMN 15 (February 1975): 9.

⁷⁷ Rugh, *Are We There Yet*, 180–181; *Wyoming Motel News* 5 (September 1965): 8; WMN 15 (February 1975): 9.

Roadside Commercial Architecture in Wyoming

Lodging: Hotels

At the beginning of the twentieth century hotels were the only type of overnight lodging available to travelers in most of the United States. These properties were typically found in larger towns and almost always within reasonable proximity to a railroad, which was still the dominant means of travel. By the 1930s Wyoming's larger towns had at least one hotel. Business collectives and local chambers

of commerce collaborated in building and promoting hotels, which were seen as essential to prosperous business communities. Local newspapers promoted the hotels, and these buildings became landmarks of economic energy. When the automobile became part of the tourist economy, hotel owners marketed their properties to motorists.

The status of hotels could not overcome the disadvantages they held for motorists. Hotels were inconveniently located

Figures 51–52. Postcard depictions of the Plains Hotel in Cheyenne, circa 1910. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



in crowded downtown areas. They lacked parking for cars and were oriented to serve train travelers and pedestrians. Hotels built after 1920 were located at the edge of business districts and so were harder to locate, especially when travelers were exhausted from a day's drive. Motorists were tired and also dirty, unlike train passengers, and were embarrassed by their appearance upon arrival in grand hotel lobbies. Because the ground floors of many hotels contained restaurants, coffee shops, and rented meeting rooms—which many times were the spaces generating the most profit for the hotel—travelers were obliged to pass through crowded public areas devoid of the privacy they later came to enjoy in lodging oriented toward automobile travel (Figures 51–52).⁷⁸

Lodging: Campgrounds

Camping was an alternative to lodging at a hotel. Motorists had the freedom to stop anywhere at any time, unlike train travelers. Motoring itself was a form of recreation, affording tourists a sense of adventure and a chance to interact with the scenery they had come to enjoy. Camping without explicit permission on private land also saved travelers money, not only on hotel rates, but also on tips, parking fees, and other small charges. Money saved

on lodging left more for gasoline, and thus led to longer trips. Motor companies began selling products such as the “Auto-Camp Comfort Outfit,” which consisted of a collapsible folding tent, bed, chair, table, and settee. The idea of free accommodations was popular in the 1910s and 1920s, but destruction of private property and litter caused landowners to post “no trespassing” signs and fence off popular camping spots.⁷⁹ In 1927 T. A. Shaw, a rancher near Wheatland, offered a one hundred-dollar reward for the arrest and conviction of tourists who started a fire that destroyed three buildings on his property.⁸⁰ Wyomingites also had cause to complain about hitchhikers who lined the highways, abandoned automobiles at the edges of towns, and “obnoxious” advertisements painted on rock features along the Lincoln Highway.⁸¹

The increase in automobile traffic in the 1920s resulted in the emergence of municipal campgrounds. These facilities were located along principal roadways in city parks or near downtown businesses. Campgrounds channeled auto traffic to spaces that were convenient and affordable for visiting motorists and that could subvert irritation and inconvenience to local landowners. Amenities included parking, camp sites, and sanitary facilities, and later expanded to electricity, picnic tables, and recreation areas

⁷⁸ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 169–170; John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle, and Jefferson S. Rogers, *The Motel in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 23–29; Heyward D. Schrock, “A Room for the Night: Evolution of Roadside Lodging in Wyoming,” in *Annals of Wyoming* 75 (2003): 31–33.

⁷⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 170; Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 31–33; Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 33–34.

⁸⁰ Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 34.

⁸¹ T. A. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 2nd Ed., Revised (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 423.

(Figure 53). The footprints of several of these municipal campgrounds survive in places like Lions Park in Cheyenne, Hamblin Park in Evanston, and Hot Springs State Park in Thermopolis. Local businesses considered auto tourists a boon to the economic community. In the summer of 1920 approximately forty thousand people camped at the municipal campground in Cheyenne. That same year the businessmen of Thermopolis estimated that auto campers contributed “approximately \$30,000” to the local economy through the purchase of groceries and automobile supplies and services.

The downside to municipal car camps was that these inexpensive (often free) campgrounds attracted undesired transients and other long-term squatters as well as tourists who truly intended to move on after a night or two. As cars became cheaper, more budget travelers began using the campgrounds, discouraging the affluent travelers who had been the first to own automobiles from staying there. To discourage extended stays, by the mid-1920s municipalities were increasingly charging entrance fees and added costs for amenities such as telephones, firewood, and showers and other sanitary facilities. Time limits on stays also were imposed. In 1923 Cheyenne began charging fifty cents a night for its best facilities, though it also maintained some free camping (Figures 54–55). Once the idea of monetizing car camps was introduced, municipal campgrounds were quickly replaced by private business owners eager to capitalize on the new market.



Private campgrounds offered travelers the ability to purchase groceries, cook meals in a communal kitchen, wash clothes in a laundry, use a telephone, and receive basic automobile services, all on site. Competition grew between private enterprises, and campground owners sought new ways to improve their offerings over nearby businesses. By the late 1920s cabins rather than tents were a common feature of private commercial campgrounds; by the end of decade tent sites had been largely phased out in favor of standalone cabins, and the earliest motor courts were born. At first many cabins were bare, but soon

Figure 53. Sheridan Tourist Park, circa 1920. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

Top: Figure 54. In 1923 the Cheyenne Municipal Camping Grounds began charging admission. The signboards flanking the entrance describe the amenities available at the campground. Credit: Russell Rein, private collection



Bottom: Figure 55. This 1923 aerial photograph shows the extent of Cheyenne's municipal campground in modern-day Lions Park. Sloan Lake is shown to the right of the photograph, and Frontier Park is visible in the background. Credit: University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, Lincoln Highway Digital Image Collection



owners began to furnish them with tables, chairs, beds, and stoves, and to supply them with electricity. Rather than encouraging a communal, neighborly experience focused on the outdoors, cabins increasingly encouraged privacy and socialization among one's traveling companions within indoor accommodations accessible for longer periods of the year and in inclement weather.⁸²

Lodging: Motor Courts

Motor courts emerged in cities and small towns along the major named highways in Wyoming. At least one enterprise, the Big Horn Camps, Inc., was formed to unite several shareholders in Sheridan, Cody, Cheyenne, Shoshoni, and perhaps other Wyoming towns in constructing “rustic cabin camps”—that is, log cabin motor courts—“in 14 Wyoming towns and scenic localities,” including Sheridan, Buffalo, Muddy Pass, Gillette, Devil's Tower [sic], Lusk, Cheyenne, Wheatland, Douglas, Casper, Thermopolis, Basin, and Cody, as well as Spearfish, South Dakota. Construction was slated to begin in the spring of 1928 at a cost estimate of seventy-five hundred dollars.⁸³

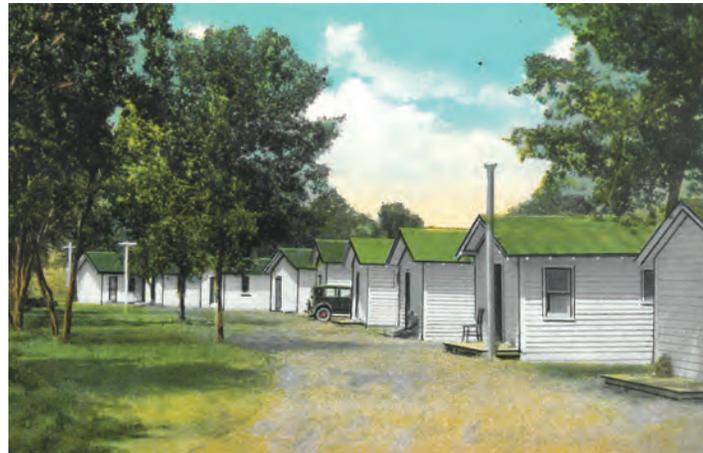
Haphazard site dispersal had been typical of tent camping, but the greater permanence of individual cabins within

⁸² Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 171–174; Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 33–34; Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 34–35; Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 408, 423.

⁸³ “Chain of Log Cabin Camping Grounds is Planned for Wyoming,” *Shoshoni Enterprise* (Shoshoni, WY), November 4, 1927, <http://newspapers.wyo.gov/>; Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 35. It remains unclear if this chain of motor courts was constructed. No evidence has been found to suggest the business venture was successful.

emerging motor courts lent itself to increasing formalization of the overall landscape of the lodging property. Standard layouts included rows of freestanding cabins, or more often U- or L-shaped configurations around a central open space. Parking spaces were clearly assigned, and communal green space was emphasized with lawn furniture. Often resembling tiny villages, cabins were placed close enough to the road to be visible to passing motorists but far enough from the road to appear private. In the 1930s subtle linguistic changes began to inform the lodging industry, deemphasizing its rustic qualities. “Court” became more common than “camp” and “cottage” began to replace “cabin.” Physically, lodging became more homey with additions like closets, rugs, dressing tables, chairs, mirrors, curtains, radios, and bathrooms complete with bathing facilities. Many individual units were heated and insulated for use over longer periods of the year. Attached covered parking became very popular in the 1930s. In addition to the groceries and communal kitchens that had been available in the 1920s, many motor court operators chose to add coffee shops or restaurants to the premises. Just as in the 1920s most motor courts offered branded (i.e., Sinclair, Standard Oil, Pennzoil, etc.) gasoline and other oil-based products for sale on site (Figure 56).⁸⁴

In Wyoming, motor court units, often called cabins or cottages, typically took the form of small gable-roofed



Top: Figure 56. The Ideal Tourist Camp was the first of several motor courts along the Lincoln Highway in Rawlins. The property included a Texaco service station attached to the lodging office. Small frame cabins were neatly arranged in parallel lines with an open space between them. The bathhouse was located in the center of the property. Covered parking was available between cabins. Credit: Frank J. Meyers Papers, Box 9B, Folder 320, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Bottom: Figure 57. Cannon's Tourist Park in Torrington rented one- and two-room “clean, cozy cottages” for \$1.00, \$1.25, and \$1.50. These small units measured 12' x 18'. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

⁸⁴ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 174–177; Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 38; Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 35–36.



Figure 58. Black and Orange Cabins, Fort Bridger. Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites & Trails restored the circa 1925 motor court between 2008 and 2009. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2013

buildings constructed of frame or log. Along the Lincoln Highway/U.S. Highway 30, cabins were typically frame. Numerous examples of these spare, simple buildings are seen in postcards (Figure 57).⁸⁵ Perhaps the best surviving example is the Black and Orange Cabins at Fort Bridger. These cabins were constructed in 1925 and operated

until 1936 near historic Fort Bridger, an important site in Western history that served as a tourist draw for those making a cross-country journey on the Lincoln Highway. These cabins were constructed simply: the side-gable roofs consist of two- by four-foot lumber joined at the peak without cross braces, ridge boards, or trusses, and the roofs sit atop a wall structure composed of two- by four-foot lumber covered in weatherboards. The interior walls are composed of fiberboards; otherwise the cabins are not insulated. The interior of each unit, eight in total, measures 13'11" x 10'2". Covered parking provided by the gabled roofs measures 14' x 7'7". These cabins are also representative of many, if not most, frame motor courts that existed during this period in Wyoming, in that they are devoid of any overt nationally-popular architectural style. The property is distinct from other similar lodging properties in the state in its historic use of orange paint with black trim to catch the eyes of passing motorists (Figure 58).⁸⁶

Highways giving access to Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks seem more likely to have offered proximity to lodging properties constructed of log. Two possible explanations for the prevalence of log motor courts in the northern part of Wyoming are: (1) log architecture more closely matched the theme of a journey to Wyoming's

⁸⁵ For example, the Minnehaha Camp in Cheyenne, the Silver Cabins in Hanna, the Sunset Camp in Medicine Bow, and the Ideal Motel in Rawlins. Postcard, Minnehaha Camp, 1928, box 713; Postcard, Silver Cabins, 1942, box 716; Postcard, Sunset Camp, 1940, box 718; Postcard, Ideal Motel, n.d., box 720. All in Coll. 10674, James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁸⁶ Wyoming Cultural Properties Form, Site 48UT2648, Black and Orange Cabin Complex. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

famous parks and through the surrounding national forests, and appealed to travelers' expectations and (2) logs were more readily available near the state's national forests. In contrast, many of the towns along the Lincoln Highway/ U.S. Highway 30 did not have a local source for finished logs. Fieldwork and archival research have produced only one late 1950s log motor court along US 30,⁸⁷ while several log motor courts have been documented in towns like Buffalo, Jackson, and Pinedale. Camp O' the Pines in Pinedale was constructed one block from U.S. Highway 191, which was originally planned as a scenic byway that diverged from the Lincoln Highway at Rock Springs and connected motorists to Jackson Hole, Grand Teton National Park, and the south entrance to Yellowstone. The history of Camp O' the Pines illustrates an important but often overlooked aspect of motor courts: although built primarily to serve as tourist lodging, cabins sometimes served other purposes in their communities. They might act as short-term rentals for workmen or, as at Camp O' the Pines, as temporary lodging for ranching women who were soon to deliver a baby and wanted to be near a doctor when they went into labor. Particularly in winter, when tourists were few, repurposing tourist lodging in this way must have been very attractive to business owners.

Camp O' the Pines has been remodeled and renamed several times since initial construction; however, the oldest, circa 1929 cabins are constructed of saddle-notched logs



Top: Figure 59. The Blue Gables Court (now the Blue Gables Motel) began operation in Buffalo in 1939 as a Rustic Revival-style motor court composed of multiple saddle-notched log cabins. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2011. Credit: Richard L. Collier



Bottom: Figure 60. The Corral Log Cabin Motel in Afton was constructed one cabin at a time between 1940 and 1960 by Doyle and Nola Medus. The logs were hauled from the west side of Star Valley, hand-peeled with a draw knife, and notched together. The interior chinking was hand-cut and fitted, and Mr. and Mrs. Medus constructed the rustic furniture used in each cabin. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

⁸⁷ The Longhorn Lodge in Rock River dates to circa 1957 and includes several log cabins in addition to a log motel unit, a log restaurant, and a large freestanding neon sign.



Figure 61. The Indian Village Motor Lodge in Cheyenne meshed several popular images of the West into a single lodging property. A concrete teepee resembling the traditional housing of Northern Plains tribes housed the motor court's office, while the lodging units reflected the Mission Revival style through the use of concrete or stucco construction, non-structural vigas, and a shaped parapet. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

that originally projected beyond the gable-roofed eaves and decreased in length as the logs ascended toward the roof. (Water damage necessitated shortening the exaggerated log corners in the 1960s.) The cabins are approximately 25' x 14' and were originally designed so that each cabin contained two lodging units. Much like the Black and Orange Cabins and other motor courts of the era, a freestanding outhouse served all cabins.⁸⁸ Unlike frame motor courts, which often carry no overt national style, Camp O' the Pines and other log motor courts displayed elements of the Rustic Revival style. The Rustic Revival emerged in the early twentieth century and was greatly influenced by the architecture of federal land management agencies that were creating buildings intended to harmonize with the natural world. Among the hallmarks of Rustic Revival style are rejection of the regularity and symmetry of

the industrial world and reliance on native wood and stone materials (Figures 59–60).

A small number of motor courts in Wyoming used elements of picturesque or romantic styles such as the Spanish Colonial Revival styles. The remaining portion of the Sunset Motor Court in Evanston incorporates elements of Mission Revival style, including stucco walls, tile awnings, and a shaped parapet. The Indian Village Motor Lodge of Cheyenne meshed several popular images of the West into a single lodging property. A concrete teepee resembling the traditional housing of Northern Plains tribes housed the motor court's office, while the lodging units reflected the Mission Revival style through the use of concrete or stucco construction, non-structural vigas, and a shaped parapet. Covered parking was integrated into the flat roof and separated individual lodging units from one another (Figure 61)⁸⁹

In the 1930s the lodging industry began to embrace a national shift away from romantic visual metaphors embodied in the picturesque architectural styles toward modern, clean design. Commenting on this new aesthetic, E. H. Lightfoot, consulting architect with *Tourist Court Journal*, wrote, "Regardless of where a court is erected it should be built of stucco with a sand finish, using modern architecture with its attractive simplicity and simple lines, and be painted pure white." Widely known as the

⁸⁸ Rheba Massey, "Log Cabin Motel," National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form (Cheyenne, 1992).

⁸⁹ Postcard, Indian Village Motor Lodge, Postcards-Motels-Wyoming, P98-19/1, Wyoming State Archives.

Streamline Moderne, the style was applied often enough to lodging properties that it was sometimes called “Motor Court Moderne.” The Blosser Auto Court in Laramie referenced the Streamline Moderne style through its curving form, stucco exterior, and continuous bands of horizontal lines that followed the perimeter of its flat roof (Figure 62).⁹⁰

The Great Depression affected all aspects of the American economy, yet the rise of tourism during the Depression and the continued sale of automobiles and dependent products such as gasoline ensured that middle-class vacationing Americans still needed overnight lodging. Few motor courts in Wyoming appear to have failed as a result of the Depression, and, as mentioned above, many improvements were made to lodging properties during this time. Nationally, the Federal Housing Administration’s decision to permit financing of cottages under two thousand dollars without a down payment allowed more lodging businesses to open. In 1933 the American Automobile Association (AAA) estimated that thirty thousand “tourist cottage and camp establishments” lined American highways. Many of these lodging properties were constructed and assembled by the business owner or local craftsmen. Kits of prefabricated lumber could be purchased from local lumberyards or traveling salesmen. Many other outfits were likely based on



plans available in popular magazines, or were constructed based on what a business owner had observed at another site. Still other buildings were adaptively reused and retrofitted to meet tourists’ needs.⁹¹

As the Great Depression worsened, out-of-work architects began to look to the still-growing lodging industry for new commissions. Similarly, manufacturers of domestic wares discovered the motor court’s potential as a showroom for stylish new products in a sluggish economy. As a result, lodging properties and their interiors underwent a period of greater standardization as architects and designers realized that growth in this market remained steady despite the state of the national economy. In addition, lodging

Figure 62. The Blosser Auto Court in Laramie referenced the Streamline Moderne style through its curving form, stucco exterior, and continuous bands of horizontal lines that followed the perimeter of its flat roof. This photograph was taken in 1939. Credit: Ludwig Svenson Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

⁹⁰ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 178–179. Photograph of Branding Iron, 178. Lightfoot quoted, 179.

⁹¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 178–180; Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 38–39; Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 36.

properties became disseminators of modernism to middle-class Americans spending the night in these “tiny, roadside exhibition centers.” The motor court had transformed from a “home away from home” to an aspirational space more modern and luxurious than many homes.⁹²

The onset of World War II, however, and especially the diversion of automobile production to war machines and the rationing of gas, introduced a period of economic hardship for automobile-oriented lodging properties. Although hotels benefited from the resulting increase in train travel, many motor courts did not survive the war years. Following the conclusion of the war in 1945, the automobile industry not only regained but quickly exceeded prewar manufacturing numbers. Nationwide, there were sixty thousand motor courts or motels by 1956. The lodging industry enjoyed a construction boom starting in the postwar years and continuing through the late 1960s, a period of upward mobility during which many Americans also purchased houses and cars. The Federal Interstate Highway Program of 1956 improved transportation across the nation and increased the ease of traveling from one part of the country to another. While Wyoming had contained 375 automobile-oriented accommodations in 1938, by 1958 the Wyoming Travel Commission was reporting a total of 570 properties.⁹³

Lodging: Motels

The postwar construction boom in automobile-oriented lodging loosely marks a transition from motor courts to motels. While the hospitality industry as whole began to embrace the term “motel” during the late 1940s, many business owners in Wyoming retained use of “motor court” or “court” until the late 1950s. As such, the use of “motor court” or “motel” by individual lodging businesses should not be considered definitive of the property type, but rather its physical characteristics. There may be a short window in which motor courts and motels were being constructed simultaneously, most likely during the late 1940s and early 1950s, but in general motor courts were far less likely to be newly constructed after World War II. There were, however, many existing motor courts that continued to operate after the war, some of which remain viable businesses today. Over time, some lodging properties that existed as motor courts prior to the war were expanded with the addition of linear multi-room units in keeping with motel construction. Because lodging properties are commercial enterprises that must meet consumer demand to survive, many motor courts, motels, and hybrid properties will demonstrate an evolution in form that reflects changing industry standards and customer expectations.

⁹² Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 180–181.

⁹³ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 181–182; Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 36.

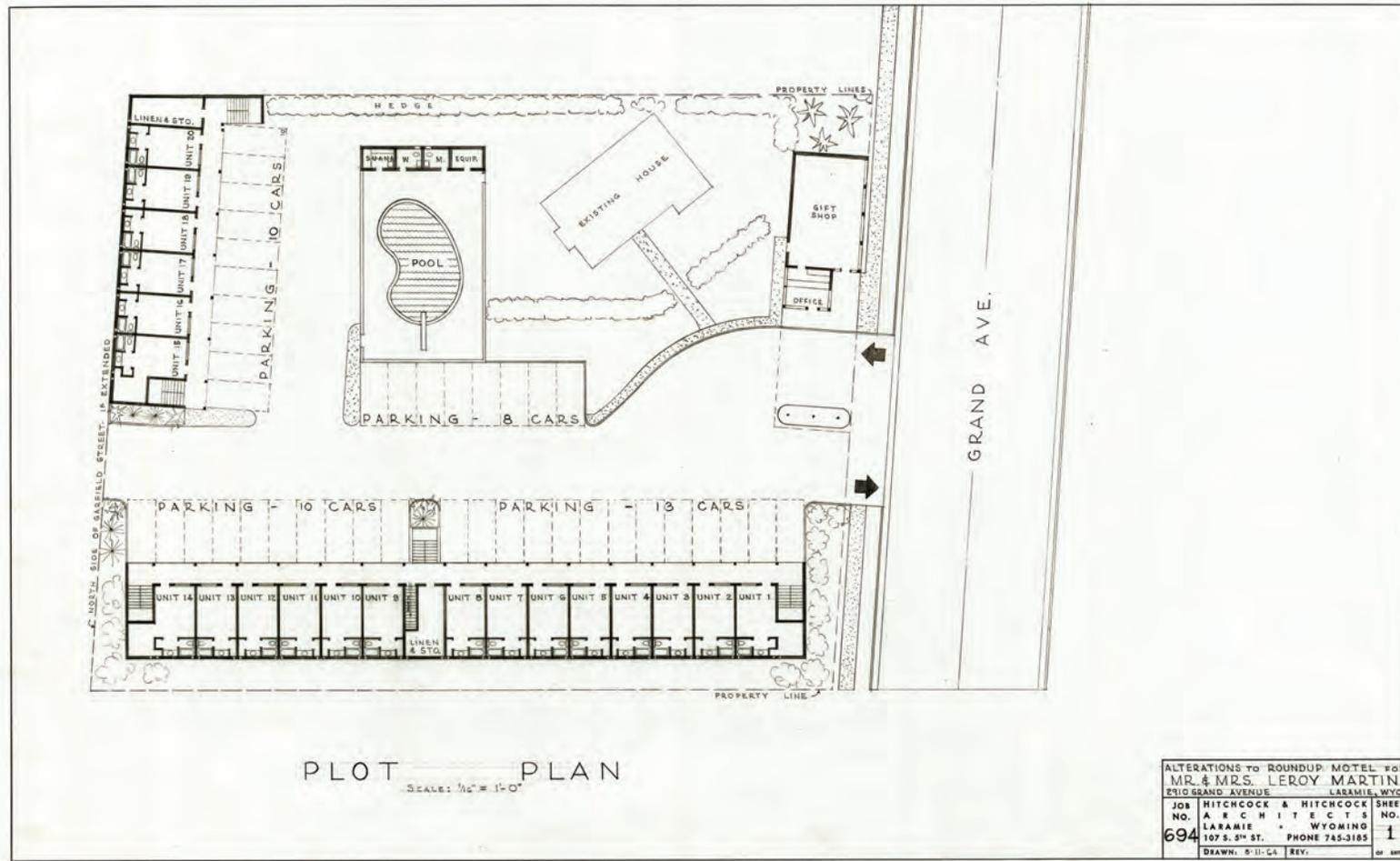


Figure 63. In 1964 Hitchcock and Hitchcock Architects of Laramie prepared a set of blueprints for Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Martin, who were altering the Roundup Motel on Grand Avenue in Laramie. Two one-story lodging buildings containing a total of twenty units were arranged in an L-shape opening to a central courtyard containing plentiful parking spaces, a kidney-shaped swimming pool, and a motel office and gift shop. The Martin's existing residence was part of the property. Credit: Hitchcock & Hitchcock Firm Records, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

After World War II, motor hotels, or “motels,” emerged in a consistent form. Instead of individual cabins, a string of private rooms, each sharing a partition wall or walls with the next, were integrated into a single building under a shared roof. Whereas hotels typically contained interior corridors from which access to individual rooms was gained, motel rooms opened directly from parking lots found in the center of the complex or, less commonly, to the rear of the building. Initially, motels were single-story buildings. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, some two-story units were being constructed. Similar to the motor courts, newly constructed motels often had a U- or L-shaped footprint, or consisted of two freestanding parallel buildings. In all cases individual units opened to the center of the property, which most often contained parking and sometimes also a shared green space (Figure 63). The rear elevations of early motels were typically devoid of architectural expression and may even have consisted of blank walls, unless a small window in each unit was present. Later, however, some motels chose to site parking behind the individual units. In these cases, a rear door within the motel room gave access to parking.

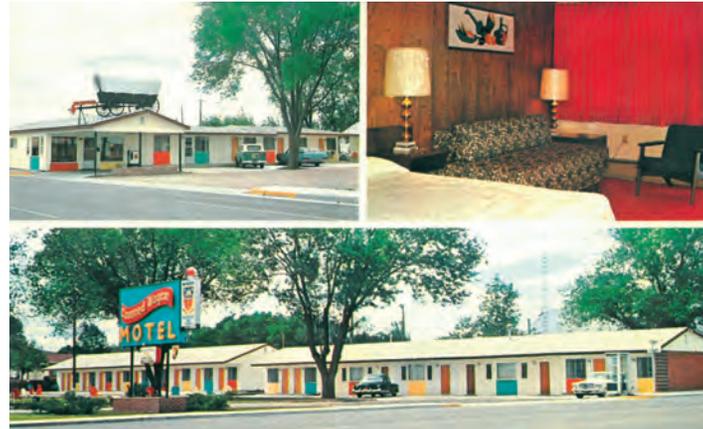
Many motels of the 1950s and 1960s were not overtly stylish and were recognizable chiefly according to their function as modern lodging properties. Whereas many motor court units had been constructed of log or frame, most motels used one or a combination of the following materials: brick, concrete block, stone, and stucco. A smaller number were frame construction. Roofs were

typically flat or gabled, often with a wide overhang that sheltered the entrance to a motel room and the open trunk of a car in the event of inclement weather. In these ways many motels reflected the design of nationally-popular American ranch houses, the dominant domestic form of the mid-twentieth century. Unlike most ranch houses, motels typically contained steel casement windows, fixed multi-pane windows, or glass blocks. Later, large fixed single-pane windows came to dominate new construction. Lodging units were typically articulated with details emphasizing that many travelers were on holiday and thus there to have fun. For example, cheery color was often applied to doors, to panels beneath windows, or to the balcony of two-story buildings. Windows might also be enlivened with awnings, valences, or other special treatments to the surrounds. Sometimes decorative concrete curtain walls drew attention to a particular aspect of the property (Figures 64–65).

Because of the uniformity of many motel buildings, and because of the need to attract motorists in moving vehicles, most lodging properties distinguished themselves from other businesses through large, often freestanding neon signs. These signs existed in a variety of forms, sizes, and shapes, but many were designed with a great deal of whimsicality and imagination. The names of motels were also important ways to appeal to travelers specifically in search of the West they had seen in popular television shows and movies. Although some lodging properties were named pragmatically—for example, Bower Court operated

by Lawrence and Esther Bower in Lander and the Rawlins Motel in Rawlins—many other motels evoked romantic ideas. The Covered Wagon Motel in Lusk, the Firebird Motor Hotel in Cheyenne, the Sage and Sand Motel in Saratoga, and the Ranger Motel in Laramie are only a few of the many motels in Wyoming in which a name and perhaps some aspects of a neon sign suggested an exotic Western destination, while the motel buildings were interchangeable with those found all across America.

Those Wyoming motels that distinguished themselves through overt references to nationally-popular styles seem to have done so in a limited number of ways. First, like the motor courts, there were a small number of motels that used elements of Spanish Colonial Revival styles. The Wyoming Motel in Cheyenne is one of these, chiefly because of its tiled roofs and stucco exterior. Second, another small group of motels exhibited a late use of Streamline Moderne, such as the El Rancho Motel (now the Federal Inn) in Riverton. The most common nod to popular national styles, however, came in the form of Exaggerated Modern rooflines, including hyperbolic canopies and barrel-vaulted walkways. The Ideal Motel in Rawlins was updated sometime in the mid- to late-1950s to include an on-site Standard Oil station under an exaggerated shed roof. The Bel Air Inn, also of Rawlins, used barrel-vaulted roofs to emphasize its restaurant, bar, and covered walkways between buildings



(Figure 66).⁹⁴ Often the component of the motel property with the most overt nod to the Exaggerated Modern style was the motel office, as at the Sands Motel in Cheyenne.

Top: Figure 64. The Covered Wagon Motel in Lusk was not overtly stylish; rather, it was distinguishable chiefly according to its function as a lodging property. Cheery pops of color, a large neon sign, and the covered wagon perched on the canopy roof of the motel office were all designed to appeal to travelers on holiday and in search of the romantic West. Postcard circa 1960. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Bottom: Figure 65. In the late 1960s and early 1970s more two-story motels were constructed. The Cliff Motor Lodge in Rawlins used a large free-standing neon sign, a colorful second-floor balcony, and a geometric curtain wall to enliven its basic commercial form. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

⁹⁴ Postcard, Ideal Motel, 1964, box 720; Postcard, Bel Air Inn, 1970, box 720. Both in Coll. 10674, James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Top: Figure 66. Exaggerated Modern rooflines were popular features of lodging properties constructed or altered during the 1960s. The Bel Air Inn of Rawlins used barrel-vaulted roofs to emphasize its restaurant, bar, and covered walkways between buildings. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



Bottom: Figure 67. The Sands Motel of Cheyenne includes an office sheltered by a multi-pitched canopy that dominates the principal façade. Credit: Erin N. Dorbin, 2013



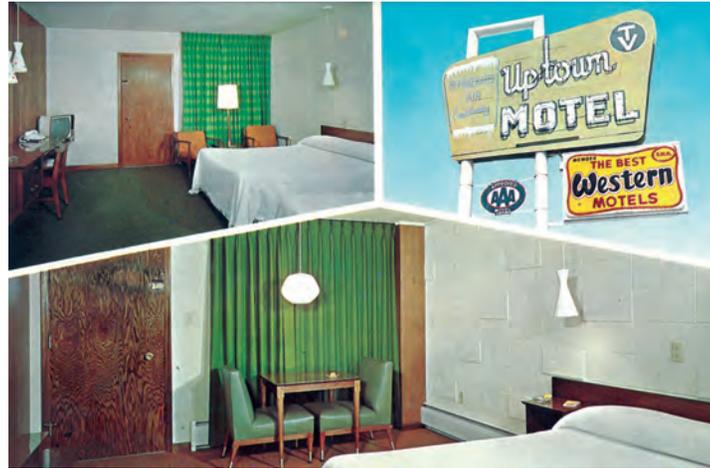
While the U-shaped motel does little to distinguish individual rooms, the office is sheltered by a multi-pitched canopy that dominates the principal façade (Figure 67).

In contrast to their thrifty exteriors, many motel owners emphasized comfortable interiors and expended funds to furnish them. Amenities included air conditioning, telephones, and radios, some of which were advertised prominently on neon signs. Brand-name mattresses were frequently listed in the description on the back of complimentary motel postcards. In 1949 *Hotel Management* (which also published on the motel trade) offered the following list of items that should be included in a typical motel guest room:

Innerspring mattresses and box springs,—woolen blankets; Heavy Chenille bed spreads; Percale sheets.—Dresser with large mirror; Writing desk (all furniture is of oak).—Two large easy chairs; One or two straight back chairs.—Luggage rack.—One or more smoking stands and at least three ash trays.—Large floor lamp, bed lamp, desk lamp and ceiling light (all with 100-watt bulbs, including bath).—Wall to wall carpeting.—Rubber mat outside door.—12 by 16-inch original water color picture; Several prints—some in groups—giving the room a homey lived-in look.—Cross ventilation—two large windows.—Venetian blinds and either sheer curtains or colorful draperies.—Window air conditioners; Ceiling fans; gas heaters.—Coin-operated radio on night stand.—Closets and drawers lined with quilted satin paper.—Closets have many coat hangers and a laundry bag.

Writing desk contains 10 sheets of writing paper; 7 envelopes; scratch pad; several post cards; blotter; business cards; sewing kit with buttons, thread and needle, pins, rubber bands, paper clips.— Telegram blanks; laundry and dry cleaning list; sample coffee shop menu; calendar and house directory. Bathrooms have: Tile shower; Plastic shower curtain; Bath mat; Facial tissue in chrome container; Two 12-oz. drinking glasses; Three bars of soap; Four face towels, four bath towels, two wash cloths.⁹⁵

Nationally, the swimming pool became an important amenity at many lodging properties during the 1950s; however, motels in Wyoming responded in a limited way to this trend. Very few locally-owned “mom-and-pop” motels appear to have added swimming pools. The Frontier Motel of Cheyenne is one exception—owners claimed to have “Wyoming’s Largest and most Luxurious” pool, which was heated and filtered and measured fifty by one hundred feet.⁹⁶ The relative unpopularity of swimming pools in Wyoming likely relates to the short summer season. Many years an outdoor pool would not be attractive until mid-June and might close again as early as mid-September, rendering it unusable for as much as three-quarters of the year. Motel owners noted that swimming pools were expensive and time-consuming to maintain, and a relatively small number



Top: Figure 68. In the 1960s motel interiors included decorative concrete block walls and dark wood paneling. Uptown Motel, Casper. Source: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Bottom: Figure 69. The Springs Motel, Rock Springs, in 2013. Credit: Elizabeth C. King



⁹⁵ Quoted in Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 183.

⁹⁶ Postcard in the private collection of Heyward Schrock. Shared with WY SHPO.

Figure 70. Cheyenne acquired one of Wyoming's first Holiday Inns in the mid-1960s, depicted in this postcard. Source: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



of guests used them.⁹⁷ Lodging properties such as the Mansion House Motel and Mountain View Motel, both in Buffalo, pointed travelers to the municipal pool in the absence of having one on site.⁹⁸ Other ancillary buildings and structures found at motels in Wyoming might include laundry facilities and eateries like dining rooms, lounges, and/or coffee shops. Landscape features included shared green spaces in the form of picnic areas or playgrounds. Shade, if it was available, was often explicitly advertised as an amenity.

By the early 1950s a number of problems were becoming apparent in mom-and-pop motels. Because of significant growth in the motel industry, many older motor courts and

the more unsophisticated motels faced stiff competition from newer and better-managed properties within their local markets and lacked the financial resources and management skills to improve their own offerings. Additionally, families that managed lodging properties were trapped in twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week businesses in a country where the majority of workers enjoyed paid vacation time, contributing to owner dissatisfaction. Worst of all, new interstate highways bypassed some of the earlier named and numbered highways, isolating small businesses such as motor courts and motels from the main stream of traffic, drastically reducing their potential market.

As some mom-and-pop motor courts and motels began to falter, the first chain motels arrived to fulfill the changes in demand for overnight lodging. While some small businesses struggled due to the challenges listed above, the concept of overnight lodging still held great potential for investors on a large scale. Though motel chains existed from the 1920s onward, the earliest franchised chains did not appear in Wyoming until the 1960s. By the mid-1960s both Cheyenne and Casper had acquired a Holiday Inn (Figure 70). Ramada Inn, Imperial 400 Motel, and Downtown Motor Inn also appeared in the 1960s. Having greater financial resources, chain motels could afford trained professional management and could compete with

⁹⁷ *Wyoming Motel News* 5 (September 1965): 6.

⁹⁸ Postcards in the private collection of Heyward Schrock. Shared with WY SHPO.

other roadside businesses—such as gas and service stations and emerging fast food chains—for prime real estate conveniently located at interstate highway interchanges.⁹⁹

Chain motels brought brand-name recognition and corporate regimentation to an in-state market dominated by mom-and-pop motels. Chain motels also introduced a new building plan previously unused in Wyoming. Based on a low-cost World War II building technique, “center-core construction” included one or more stories of rooms arranged back to back along a utility core. The bathrooms of every four units were grouped at the intersecting corners. Doors and windows faced outside, and circumferential walkways served the rooms.¹⁰⁰ By the late 1950s other chain motels relied on mid-rise construction, enclosing central corridors and adding elevators for access to upper floors. Unlike the long stretches of early highways, land at interchanges came at a premium price, and building up rather than sprawling out was expedient.

Chain motels rarely branded themselves architecturally; in contrast, many fast-food chains of the day began to adopt specialized rooflines and other structural characteristics that have become obvious parts of brand identity, often recognizable even when a former restaurant building is

vacant. Instead, the corporate logo, such as the golden crown of Best Western or “Holiday Inn” in the chain’s distinctive script, came to signal standardized, reliable guest rooms and a positive experience that could be replicated across the country. Ultimately, the power of brand identity would give chain motels a considerable advantage over small lodging businesses in Wyoming as in the rest of the nation.¹⁰¹

Many of the first chain motel properties in Wyoming have been demolished, or have been altered over time in such a way that they do not retain integrity to their date of construction. The Downtown Motor Inn, built in 1963 in Cheyenne, was the first of the Downtown chain to be constructed in Wyoming and possesses relatively high integrity. Unlike most automobile-oriented lodging in Wyoming, the Downtown Motor Inn was constructed in the heart of the historic commercial district rather than at the periphery. The motel included four floors of rooms (eighty-eight rooms in total) atop a substantial ground floor level that housed a coffee shop, dining room, cocktail lounge, and meeting rooms (Figure 71). A Village Inn Pancake House and enclosed swimming pool were part of the site. Because of its location downtown, the motel relied on a basement garage.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 18–186; Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 37.

¹⁰⁰ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 186.

¹⁰¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 186–187; Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 37–38.

¹⁰² Schrock, “A Room for the Night,” 38.

Figure 71. The Downtown Motor Inn in Cheyenne included four floors of rooms (eighty-eight rooms in total) atop a substantial ground floor level that housed a coffee shop, dining room, cocktail lounge, and meeting rooms. Source: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



Little America is a regional chain of motels and hotels with roots in Wyoming. In 1934 the original Little America began as a small gas station, a motor court of twelve cabins, and a café. Little America was located near the town of Granger on U.S. Highway 30. When the property burned in 1950, owner S. M. Covey decided to rebuild closer to the eventual location of Interstate 80.¹⁰³ Today, Little America is the largest “travelers’ oasis” in Wyoming and boasts its own zip code and its own interstate highway interchange.

Referral chains became an important factor in the Wyoming lodging industry. Referral chains consisted of small groups of motel owners that cooperated in upgrading properties. Ultimately, individual owners intended to

create networks of lodging properties maintained to prescribed standards that would allow an owner in one locality to recommend lodging in another town along a traveler’s route with confidence. Each member of a referral chain pledged to maintain mutual standards and display the group’s identifying emblem. An early referral chain member in Wyoming was the Indian Village Motor Lodge in Cheyenne, which belonged to the United Motor Courts chain. United Motor Courts was organized in California in 1933 and became the most successful of the early chains. In 1936 the group claimed,

You will find in United Motor Courts a new and unparalleled achievement in combining comfort and economical luxury with the convenience of first floor accommodations made necessary by our present mode of automobile travel. United Motor Courts is a group of independent owners, comprising only those motor courts which come up to the highest standards in comfort, quiet atmosphere, and courteous service.

Members retained their own name but identified themselves through a shield logo that mimicked the new shield markers used throughout the federal highway system. United Motor Courts remained a strong presence in the lodging industry until after World War II.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Wyoming Cultural Properties Form, 48SW3979, Little America. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 139–140.

Best Western, formed in 1946 in Long Beach, California, became the dominant referral chain in Wyoming by the 1960s. Unlike earlier referral chains, Best Western was incorporated (as Western Motels, Inc.). Promoters drove major western highways soliciting membership from existing mom-and-pop motor courts and motels. In the early 1960s membership in Best Western offered many benefits. The company printed and distributed travel guides that listed the proximity of member lodging properties to the nearest major highway. They also purchased advertising in publications priced beyond the reach of many small business owners, including national magazines, major newspapers, and AAA directories. Best Western allowed travelers to pay in advance for reservations. It also made group purchasing of furnishings and supplies available to small business owners, allowing individual lodging properties to enjoy discounted prices like the national chains. Best Western provided its members with insurance, affiliated with several major credit-card companies, and offered design and accounting expertise through its national headquarters to property owners who likely lacked education in these areas.

Each motel affiliated with Best Western operated under its own name but prominently displayed the company logo. Members were also required to purchase products such as soap bars and shower curtains branded with the Best Western crown. The chain reinforced strict standards. Each year two salaried field representatives inspected

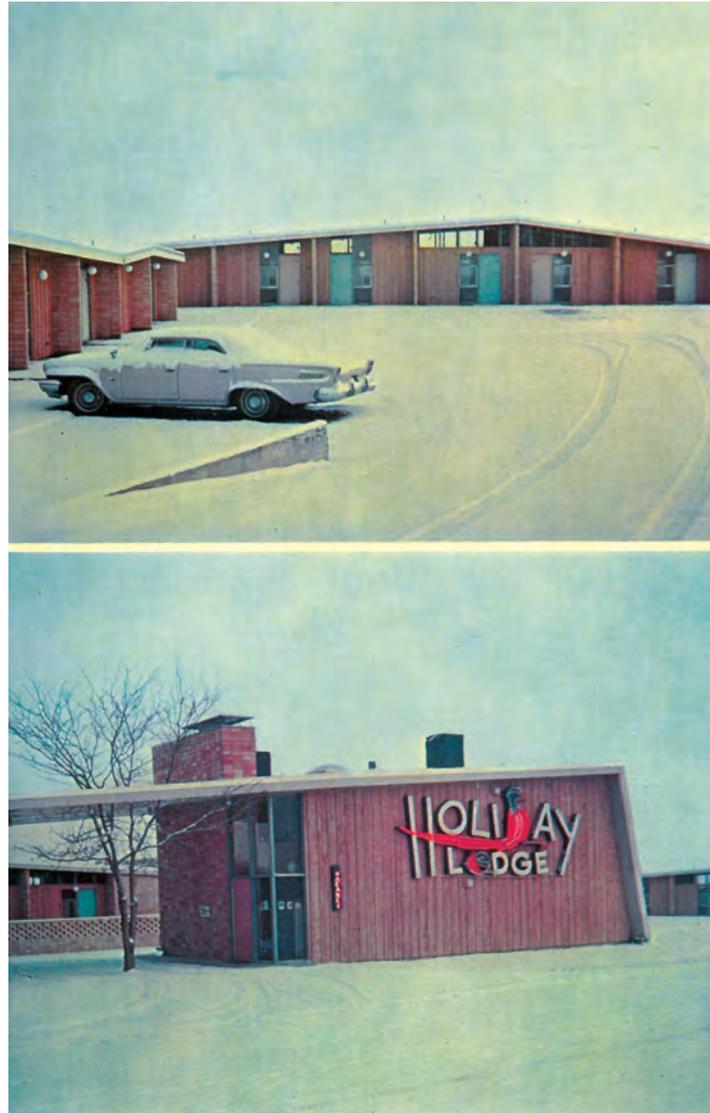


Figure 72. The Holiday Lodge in Lander is one of the best preserved of the early Best Western referral chain members, though it is no longer affiliated with the company. This postcard is marked "Spring 1967." Source: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

motels within the system. In addition, each member was required to inspect three other member motels. In 1963 members paid dues of two hundred and fifty dollars for the first twelve units and fifteen dollars for each additional unit up to forty-nine units. A sliding scale determined dues for larger motels. At an annual convention members elected officers, drafted changes to the constitution, and shared information. The chain developed marketing programs and decreased the operating costs of small businesses through bulk purchasing, shared-risk insurance, credit-card discounts, and training programs.¹⁰⁵

The Holiday Lodge in Lander is one of the best preserved of the Best Western members, though it is no longer affiliated with the company. On the back of a postcard marked “Spring 1967,” the motel claims to have “Lander’s Finest Accommodations” and lists among its amenities “T.V.—Phones, Attractively Spacious Units in a New Motel, Kitchenettes Available for Sportsmen.” The Best Western and AAA logos are included (Figure 72).¹⁰⁶

Gasoline Stations and Automobile Services: Early Automobile Services

At the turn of the twentieth century the first automobile owners had to seek out gasoline at oil distribution terminals often sited far from the main commercial districts. While

automobiles remained a novelty, oil companies were primarily concerned with making kerosene for lamps and lubricants for machinery. Oil was transferred in a metal can from bulk tank to car tank. By 1905 newly-invented pumps allowed gas to be transferred to a waiting car via rubber hose. Pumps were much preferred to hand-held containers because they reduced evaporation and kept gas free from impurities. Pumps also allowed gas to be transferred without spilling, thus reducing the threat of fire. This improvement in fuel transfer made cars a more practical mode of transportation, contributing to the car’s rise in popularity. Between 1909 and 1919 gasoline consumption outpaced the demand for kerosene as it occupied first 25 percent of the petroleum market and then 85 percent of the market by the end of the decade. As car sales skyrocketed, the demand for gasoline followed. In response to the demand the nation’s oil companies not only increased production but also began to scout for locations to sell oil and fuel conveniently to motorists.

The first retailers to offer gasoline pumps were existing businesses. Carriage houses, hardware stores, bicycle shops, groceries, feed stores, garages, blacksmith shops, and livery stables began selling gasoline from curbside pumps, making the gas pump a fixture of the urban landscape (Figure 73). Some of these retailers had previously sold gas in tin cans that was poured by hand into automobile tanks.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 142–146.

¹⁰⁶ Postcard, “Holiday Lodge,” Postcards-Lodges-Wyoming, PC02-610, Wyoming State Archives.

Wholesale distributors ran horse-drawn tank wagons and refilled barrels kept in auto repair shops and garages. By first utilizing existing businesses, oil companies could make their products available without taking time to build branded infrastructure and hire and train staff. This system created problems for communities, however. Curbside pumps encouraged lines of cars that blocked trolley tracks and created other traffic bottlenecks. Pumps also presented a safety hazard, as an out-of-control vehicle could easily strike a pump and cause an explosion or fire. By the early 1920s municipal officials across the country sought to outlaw curbside pumps, calling them fire hazards. In rural areas many general stores maintained a gas pump or two well into the mid-twentieth century.

When the Lincoln and Yellowstone highways were first routed, there were no dedicated gas stations in Wyoming. Instead the 1910s route guides demonstrate that many existing businesses began augmenting their services to meet new demands introduced with the automobile. The rise of the automobile rendered many livery, carriage houses, and blacksmith shops obsolete unless these businesses chose to adapt to changing technology. The “Auto Livery” at the corner of Eighteenth Street and Capitol Avenue in Cheyenne, for example, offered “storage,” “repairing,” and “accessories” in addition to traditional livery services.¹⁰⁷ Auto storage was an important service many garages



offered in the 1910s. The issue of where to securely park an automobile overnight was a problem hotels had not been designed to address, leading over time to the decline of hotels in central business districts and the rise of motor courts on the peripheries of towns, where parking was abundant. During the intervening years many hotels solved the parking problem by expanding or entering into partnerships with garages. In the 1918 edition of the *Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*

Figure 73. Curbside gasoline pump on Main Street, Dubois. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

¹⁰⁷ *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association in Wyoming and Colorado* (Cody, WY: Gus Holm, 1916), 25.

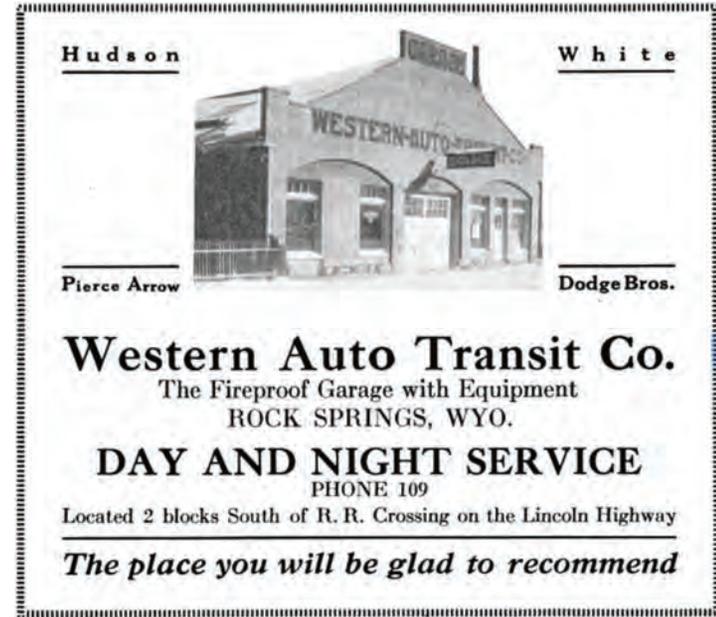
Left: Figure 74. An advertising spread from the 1918 *Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway* showing the Plains Hotel and Plains Auto Company. Public domain

Right: Figure 75. Advertisement for the Western Transit Auto Company in Rock Springs from the 1915 *Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*. Public domain



the Plains Hotel and Plains Auto Company share an advertising spread (Figure 74). The Virginian Hotel in Medicine Bow offered a “garage in connection.”¹⁰⁸ Other independent garages gave motorists directions starting from landmark hotels, as at the Yellowstone Garage in Douglas: “One half-block south of La Bonte Hotel.”¹⁰⁹

One important feature emphasized over and over in advertisements of the 1910s was the “fireproof” construction of these brick and concrete block buildings. This term likely indicates that at least some of these buildings were constructed with steel and reinforced concrete capable of supporting heavy loads and being resistant to vibrations. These substantial buildings were designed to house a myriad of services in addition to the floor space frequently given



to auto storage and sales. Garages were often two stories in height or else long, sprawling buildings that dominated commercial blocks. Several early garages were recorded during the 2013 Lincoln Highway survey, including the circa 1910 Western Transit Auto Company in Rock Springs (Figure 75), the 1919 Sweetwater Auto Company in Green River (Figure 76), and the Trans-Continental Garage in Evanston. The first two buildings are of brick and concrete block construction with a gable-frame and vaulted-frame

¹⁰⁸ *Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway* (Detroit: Lincoln Highway Association, 1918), 201, 207.

¹⁰⁹ *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association*, 60.

roof, respectively. Their original designs included drive-in access for automobiles. The Trans-Continental Garage is a two-story, brick building with a flat roof. It was built in 1885 as Down's Opera House and significantly modified circa 1910 with the addition of a garage opening at street level.¹¹⁰

In Casper, many new businesses devoted to automobile service became concentrated on the western edge of the central business district where the Yellowstone Highway exited town. Architectural historian Kerry Davis has analyzed the development of automobile services in the Yellowstone District using Casper city directories from the early twentieth century. She writes,

The 1912 city directory listed two liverys, three harness and saddle businesses, and three horseshoer/blacksmiths, as well as the first listings for automobile-related businesses of just three auto livery/garages. By 1917, the city directory still listed four blacksmiths operating, but now also included listings for seven auto garages, seven separate auto liverys, and numerous automobile-related businesses including filling stations, auto painters, upholsters, repairer, tires, tops, and so forth. . . .

Filling and service stations, as well as various automobile associated businesses sprang up to serve



both the tourists and the increasing numbers of local automobile owners. By 1925, along the four blocks of West Yellowstone Highway shown on the Sanborn Fire Insurance map were three commercial auto garages with a total capacity of more than 260 cars, seven repair/service stations, three auto dealers, a vulcanizing shop, a filling station, and an auto painting shop.¹¹¹

Figure 76. The Sweetwater Auto Company, constructed in 1919 on the Lincoln Highway in Green River. Credit: Sweetwater County Historical Museum

¹¹⁰ Eileen Starr and Michael Gorman, "Downtown Evanston Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form (Cheyenne, 1983).

¹¹¹ Preservation Solutions LLC, "Cultural Resource Survey, Downtown and Old Yellowstone Districts, Casper, Wyoming" (Casper Historic Preservation Commission, 2015), 56–57. On file at WY SHPO.

Today the high concentration of auto-related historic buildings in Casper's Yellowstone District is still evident, as many of these buildings retain characteristics of buildings in service to the auto industry although their present functions have mostly changed. Though historian Chester Liebs notes the national prevalence of these so-called "automobile rows,"¹¹² this is the only such historic concentration that remains evident in Wyoming.

Automobile showrooms or dealerships also became part of the early-twentieth-century commercial landscape. Within the 300 block of West Cedar Street in Rawlins, two

one-story commercial buildings served as auto showrooms during the Lincoln Highway and U.S. Highway 30 eras. In addition to having facades dominated by display windows, the westernmost bays of each building open to interior open-air courts where automobiles could be parked for servicing or sales. The curb is at grade in front of both bays to facilitate driving in and out. The landmark auto showroom in Wyoming is the 1927 Dinneen Motor Company building in downtown Cheyenne (Figure 77). The Dinneen family began their involvement in transportation by establishing the Bon Ton Livery Stables in 1895. In 1909 William Dinneen built a garage at the

Figure 77. The 1927 Dinneen Motor Company building on the Lincoln Highway in Cheyenne. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2014



¹¹² Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 83–86.

corner of 16th Street and Pioneer Avenue. It is this business that the 1916 Yellowstone Highway route book advertises as a garage, filling station, and agent for Hudson and REO automobiles. In 1927, during a period characterized nationally by the erection of grand, impressive auto dealerships, Dinneen financed the showroom that stands today. Cream-colored terra cotta finishes, shield-bearing lion gargoyles, and engaged octagonal turrets enliven this corner red brick building designed by Cheyenne architect Frederick Hutchinson Porter. The high level of finish exhibited to customers in the interior showroom quickly gave way to the industrial character of the rear service areas.¹¹³

Gasoline Stations and Automobile Services: Gasoline Stations

Gasoline stations are roadside commercial facilities designed to sell gas along with products such as lubricants, tires, and batteries. Gas stations also offer minor repair services like motor tuning and tire alignment. While modern gas retailing includes convenience stores, car washes, truck stops, etc., these types of services were rarely connected to gas stations before the 1970s. Historically, gas stations have also been called filling stations and service stations.¹¹⁴

Like lodging, automobile maintenance was a service that motorists depended upon. Unlike lodging, automobile maintenance was based around the consumption of products—branded oil and gasoline—which encouraged the development of a physical corporate structure much earlier than in the lodging industry. While branded motel chains were uncommon in Wyoming before the 1960s, gasoline stations constructed according to standard corporate designs began to appear during the Great Depression. Even prior to the early standardized stations, local garages and auto dealerships had dealt with one specific car manufacturer and sold petroleum products stamped with one oil company's proprietary logo.

In a country as large and diverse as the United States, many building traditions are linked to local or regional cultural patterns, and distinctions can often easily be made between architecture in different regions of the country. In contrast to this principle the gas station appeared and evolved almost everywhere simultaneously. Gas stations, almost from the beginning, were part of an organized commercial industry that spread standardized station plans through trade journals such as *National Petroleum News* and other media. The physical form of the gas station became a critical tool in marketing branded oil and oil-based products.

¹¹³ "Dinneen Motor Company Building," Historic Preservation Certification Application, Part 1-Evaluation of Significance (Cheyenne, November 2010). On file at WY SHPO.

¹¹⁴ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 131.

Historians John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle describe what they refer to as “place-product-packaging” in the following way:

After the Civil War, corporations in nearly every industry sought to establish at the retail level clear identities for their products in order to build large regional if not national markets. By establishing customer preference for a product clearly named and readily identifiable in stores, companies sought to establish market penetration, if not dominance. Mass marketing, driven by widespread advertising, enabled economies of scale in production, engendering lower production costs and wider profit margins

Regional and national brands implied quality, as the customer was assured of a known product maintained to corporate standards. Unbranded merchandise, in contrast, carried only a guarantee from the retailer and not a promise from the manufacturer. Purchasing products stamped with a corporate logo allowed even the most rural Americans to feel connected to modern manufacturing practices in more cosmopolitan places. The logo itself permitted consumers to purchase a sense of social prestige alongside the functional purpose of the product.¹¹⁵

Jakle and Sculle summarize the tangible results of place-product-packaging on gas stations as a “‘total design’ concept.”

Each company sought to coordinate logos, color schemes, signage, and building architecture toward creation of chains of attractive, look-alike retail outlets. Careful attention was given to gasoline pump design and pump coloring and marking, point-of-purchase advertisements (including office, window, and driveway displays), uniforms worn by attendants and attendant demeanor, and, of course, product line and service mix.¹¹⁶

The landscape of gasoline stations and other automobile services in Wyoming follows national and regional trends and corporate designs, resulting in a physical record that tells a story about developments within the state, but also the nation. Like many types of corporate commercial architecture, gas stations had an element of ephemerality, being constantly refreshed or modernized to meet not only consumer expectations but also corporate marketing schemes.

Nationally the first gasoline stations began to appear around 1905. While a few corporate stores were built in larger cities like St. Louis, Missouri, and Seattle, Washington, many

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 36–37, 130–131.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 45.

of the other early stations were operated by oil distributors who built and ran their own stations or leased them. Many individuals bought lots, put up structures, and negotiated contracts to sell gas for oil companies. By the mid-1910s stations had appeared along open roads, in vacant lots in peripheral commercial strips, on main streets, and on the lawns of residential neighborhoods.

Gasoline stations signaled a change in urban land use. Drive-in stations required buildings to be sited away from the curb line in order to remove cars from the flow of traffic. Motorists needed enough space to pull their vehicles out of traffic and then reenter the street once they had paid for gas. In denser urban areas, existing buildings were often leveled to accommodate this new type of service. For the first time a significant portion of an urban site was given over to parking, with a relatively small amount of space allotted to a building that sheltered attendants and a gas pump or two, alongside signage within easy sight of the road.¹¹⁷

The first gas stations were little more than shacks, sheds, or repurposed agricultural outbuildings (Figure 78). These stations housed lubricating oils, greases, and equipment. Because early car models were not designed to be driven in inclement weather or during the winter, little thought was given to protecting the station operator or customers from the elements. By the 1910s, however, the first prototypical,



substantial stations began to appear. Oil companies built gasoline stations of brick, cut stone, and concrete having Beaux Arts and Neoclassical details. The most refined examples resembled smaller versions of banks, libraries,

Figure 78. The Cecil Robinson Garage, an early gas station in Fort Bridger, was a repurposed agricultural outbuilding with a gas pump on the Lincoln Highway. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

¹¹⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 95–98; Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*, 49–50, 135.

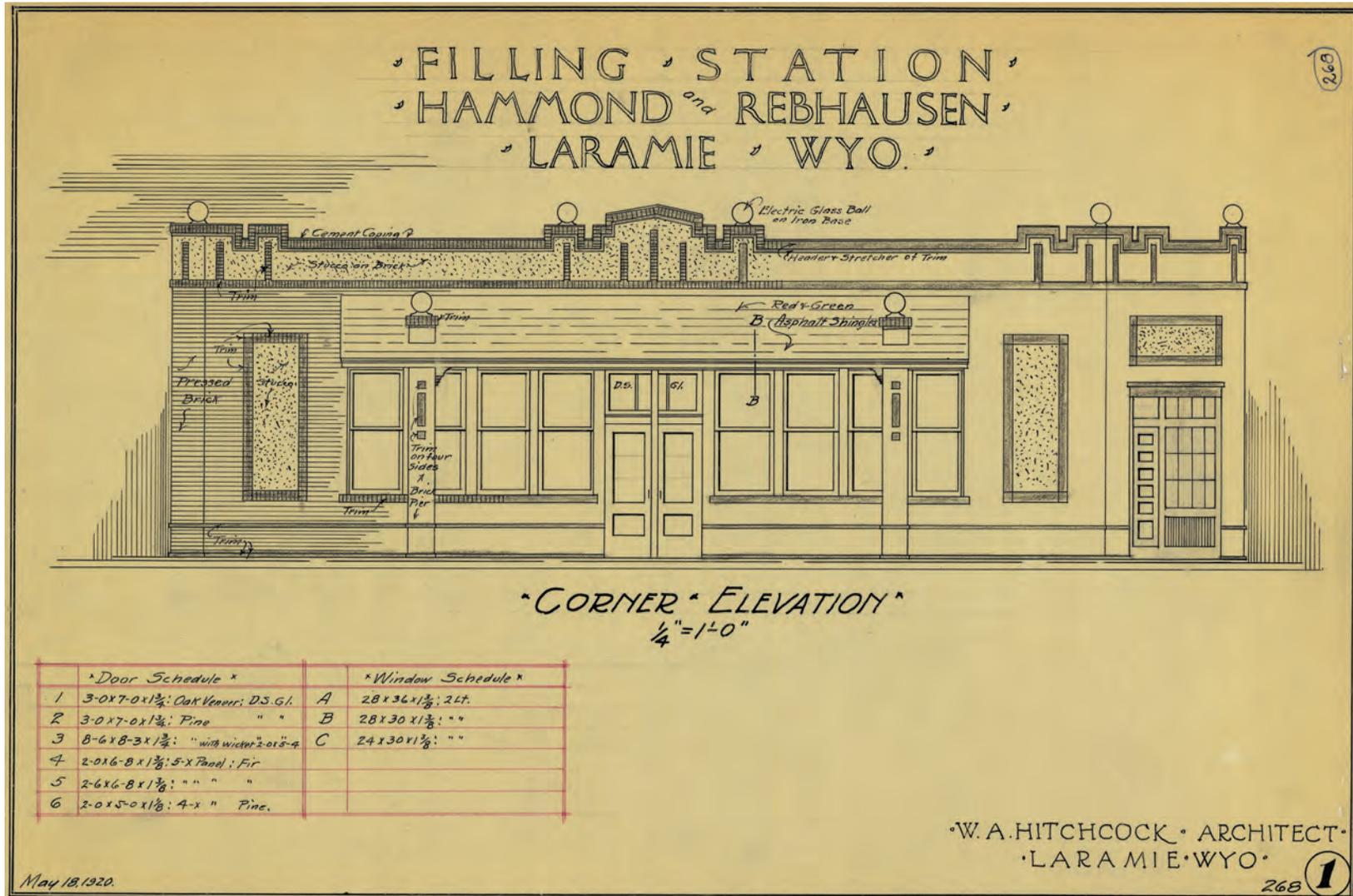
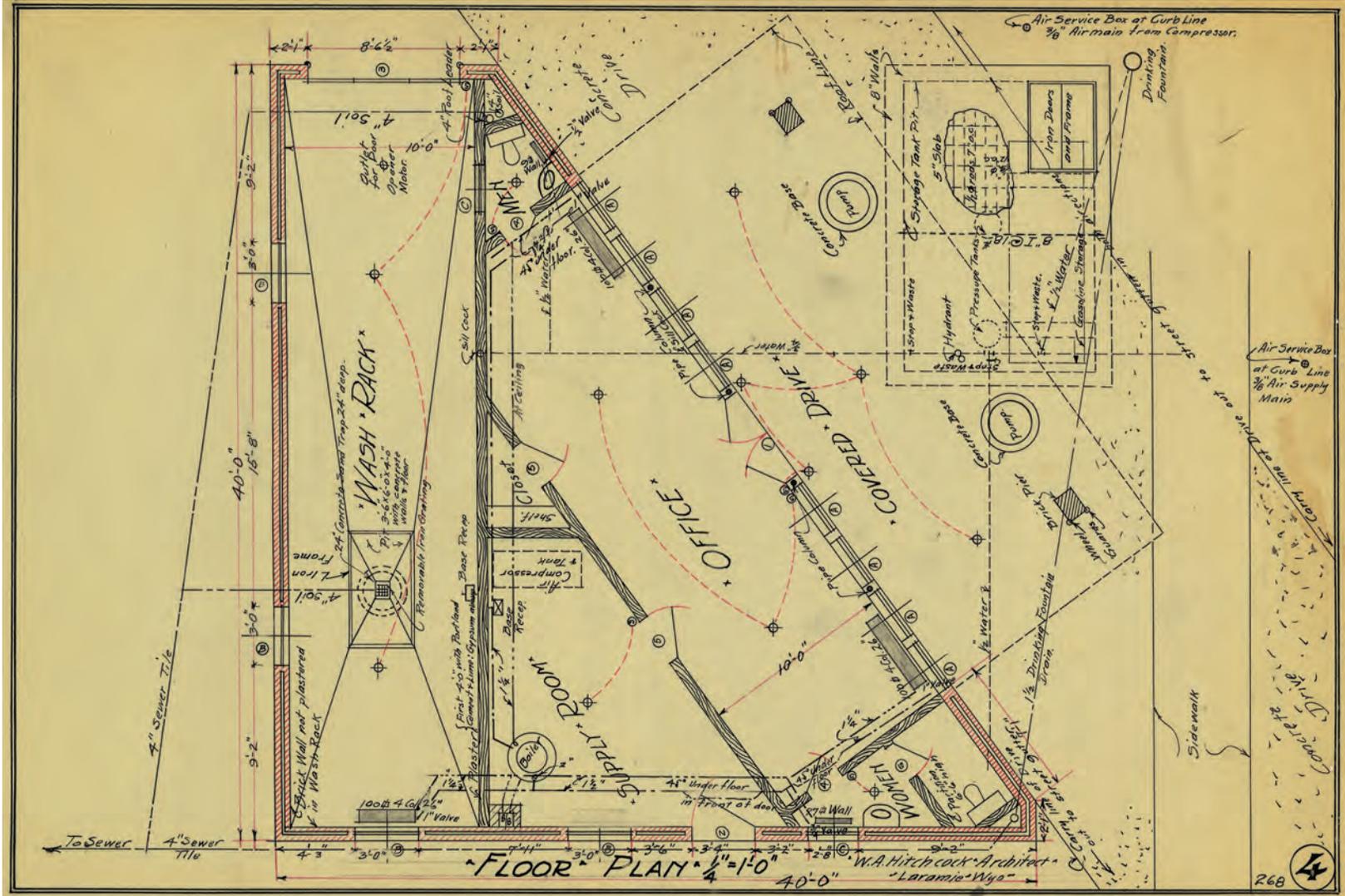


Figure 79. Architect W.A. Hitchcock of Laramie designed this 1920 gas station for Hammond and Rebhausen in Laramie. Credit: Hitchcock & Hitchcock Firm Records, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



and city halls of the same period. The dramatic shift from shed to “civic asset” came in response to the concerns of early city planners and municipal officials espousing the ideals of the City Beautiful movement. This movement encouraged the development of park-lined avenues, dramatic urban vistas, and monumental buildings, and its proponents were alarmed by the proliferation of industrial commercial structures within the heart of business districts and residential areas.¹¹⁸

Early gas stations were generally located near central business districts. After 1920 oil companies began to build stations in more affluent residential neighborhoods. They purchased large corner lots accessible to drivers from two streets. The encroachment of commercial buildings in established residential neighborhoods met with resistance in many towns and led citizens to support zoning controls meant to keep gas stations out of neighborhoods. To reduce this opposition, oil companies began to design stations that resembled residential buildings. Little houses connoted friendliness, comfort, and security in the minds of consumers. Small house-form gas stations dominated construction in the 1920s and continued to be built throughout the 1930s (Figure 79).

House-form stations often had low hip or steep gable roofs. They contained small offices, storage rooms, and

public restrooms. Customers could purchase soft drinks, cigarettes, and candy as well as gas and other petroleum products. Many house-form stations were prefabricated, saving labor costs during construction and allowing business owners to reassemble the building at another location if the first was not profitable. The lower cost of prefabricated stations allowed oil companies to erect more buildings, thereby establishing larger trade territories. Several standardized buildings were advertised in a manufacturer’s catalog. In addition, oil companies could develop custom-designed prefabricated models for exclusive corporate use. Prefabricated house-form stations were built using structural steel, having sections that could be easily bolted together. They were faced in brick, stucco, zinc, or heavy galvanized steel. Roofing materials included clay or metal tile, copper, zinc, or galvanized steel. Many house-form stations had plate-glass windows set in steel sash.¹¹⁹ In the 1910s it became common for canopies to be added to house-form stations. On Grand Avenue in Laramie, for example, there is a former Aero station that resembles a small house with a hip roof that projects forward to form a canopy. A 1925 photograph shows a small brick building with a tile canopy supported by brick columns (Figure 80). Gasoline pumps are sheltered beneath the canopy.

Other house-form stations incorporated service bays. By 1925 many gas stations had grease pits and car-

¹¹⁸ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 98–99; Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*, 137.

¹¹⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 101–102; Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*, 137–138.



Figure 80. Aero house-form station on the Lincoln Highway in Laramie, 1925. Credit: Ludwig Svenson Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

washing floors. Covered bays corresponding to washing and lubricating floors were added to existing stations or incorporated in new designs. Additional bays might also allow stations to offer engine, brake, muffler, and other repairs on site.¹²⁰ Perhaps the best preserved example of a house-form station with service bays is a former Continental Oil Company (Conoco) station located at 202 West Cedar Street in Rawlins (Figure 81). The

principal roof is of side gable construction. The office entrance is located within a projecting asymmetrical front gable that suggests the English Cottage style. A chimney protrudes from the front slope of the main roof, and two service bays abut the office. Other English Cottage Conoco stations may still be found in Worland and Greybull and have been repurposed as a real estate office and lawyer's office, respectively.

¹²⁰ Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*, 141–144.



Figure 81. This former English Cottage-style Conoco gas station is located on the Lincoln Highway in Rawlins. Credit: Richard L. Collier, 2016

By the early 1920s blacksmith shops and independent garages were no longer adequate to keep up with the demand for auto repair among the ever-growing ranks of car owners. In response to this demand, oil companies and independent station owners added grease pits, made space for repairing flat tires, and began to stock replacement parts like bulbs and batteries. By the late 1920s the gas station

was evolving into a hybrid of filling station and repair garage—the neighborhood service station. Accordingly, by the mid-1920s prefabricated station manufacturers started offering auxiliary service buildings including deluxe stations that combined wash racks, grease pits, and storage for tires and batteries. By the end of the decade the dual filling and service functions were expressed through service bays attached to the station. Interior spaces consisted of an office, bathroom, and utility room, in addition to service areas. In most of the nation, newly-constructed gas stations lost their canopies during this transition, largely because of a desire to improve traffic circulation and to keep service bays from being obstructed. In Wyoming and other Western states, oil companies like Texaco continued to build canopies to shield attendants from the full strength of the sun (Figure 82).

By the early 1930s the gas station had assumed several characteristics it would retain for decades to come. A basic rectangular footprint housing both office and service areas had been established. Within the commercial site, the gas pumps had been moved farther from the flow of traffic at the front of the station and were often rooted on islands. The Great Depression brought about several additional refinements. As gas revenues declined, oil companies became increasingly dependent on the sale of tires, batteries, and accessories. House-form stations might have been pleasing to the eye, but they did not make good showrooms, lacking the floor area, lighting, and display

windows to exhibit these products effectively. Additionally, manufacturers of all kinds of products were redesigning their wares to stimulate purchasing during the economic crisis. One way for oil companies to make their products appear streamlined and up-to-date was to redesign the stations that dispensed them (Figure 83).¹²¹

Oil companies began to lean away from the picturesque styles found in many house-form stations toward the new International style popular in Europe, particularly in Germany. While the oblong box stations that emerged during the 1930s referred loosely to the International style through their use of rectilinear forms, plane surfaces having little ornamentation, and open interior plans, it was perhaps more appealing that these stations also required a simple, functional type of construction ideal for a difficult financial climate. A typical station of this time was a flat-roofed box having rectangular perimeter dimensions. Larger offices were integrated under the same roof as the service bays. Plate glass became a large component of the façade, while other decorative elements were diminished. Structurally, many stations were constructed of brick and faced with terra cotta. In the 1940s and 1950s porcelain enamel became the pervasive facing material (Figure 84).

The national preference for the oblong box station was hastened in part through the designs of industrial engineer Walter Dorwin Teague. In 1934 Texaco hired Teague to



Top: Figure 82. By the late 1920s the gas station was evolving into a hybrid of filling station and repair garage—the neighborhood service station. Texaco built service stations with canopies in Wyoming and other Western states. This station in Cheyenne expressed the Mission Revival style through its use of stucco and non-structural vigas. Credit: Wyoming State Archives



Bottom: Figure 83. Keahey's Motor Court in Buffalo included a streamlined Texaco service station based on the designs of industrial engineer Walter Dorwin Teague. In 1934 Texaco hired Teague to create branded architecture for the company's gas stations. Teague's Texaco stations were white streamlined boxes intended to suggest speed, modernity, and progress. Red or green details emphasized the horizontality of these one-story buildings. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

¹²¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 102–105.

Figure 84. In the 1940s and 1950s porcelain enamel panels, as seen here on the interior of Darren's Towing and Repair in Green River, became the pervasive facing material for streamlined service stations. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2013



create branded architecture for the company's gas stations. Teague's Texaco stations were white streamlined boxes intended to suggest speed, modernity, and progress. Red or green details emphasized the horizontality of these one-story buildings. Many other oil companies began building oblong box stations, modified to facilitate customer recognition by raised or lowered roof lines, curved corners, extended or recessed entrance bays, and added canopies, towers, or pylons. Prior to 1950 most oblong box stations were prefabricated. Steel I-beam frames were shop-assembled in sections, bolted together at the construction site, and covered with porcelain enamel sheets and plate glass. After 1950 concrete-block construction replaced prefabricated steel; concrete blocks were in turn replaced by acrylic-vinyl and translucent plexiglass in the 1960s (Figure 85).

Oil companies modified the standard oblong box station in a number of ways. In the Western United States, Texaco used elements of the Spanish Colonial Revival styles. Other companies built stations using a modified version of the Colonial Revival style. Whereas gas stations of the 1920s had integrated visually in residential neighborhoods, the new oblong boxes were designed to maximize visibility. Porcelain and glass façades were easily lit at night for around-the-clock sales appeal. Because early examples were prefabricated, oblong boxes could be constructed quickly, moved or salvaged if a site proved unprofitable, and easily maintained because porcelain does not need to be painted.

Oblong boxes were larger than house-form stations and contained little wasted space, and the large display windows facilitated selling through point of purchase display.¹²²

After dominating new construction during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, oblong box stations fell from favor in the 1960s. Planning and zoning commissions as well as the public at large criticized their high visibility. Several oil companies began to explore modifications to new designs in order to make gas stations more compatible with suburban landscapes. One of the most popular solutions to changing consumer taste was designing stations to resemble nationally-popular ranch houses. *National Petroleum News* characterized the new development thus: “It very definitely does not gloss, glitter, or glare. The so-called ‘ice-box’ look is out. While most of the designs still use a basic metal building, they mustn’t look like metal. Rustic features like cedar shakes, used brick, roof overhang, and darker colors are common.”¹²³ A newly constructed station of this style cost on average \$65,000; however, older oblong boxes could be updated by replacing the porcelain enamel, adding a flat, front-gable roof, and extending the eave on one end of the building to form a porch. The new stations were sometimes called “blend-ins.” Small box stations also began to be built. Small box stations were often independently operated and sold only gasoline and oil, along with snacks, drinks,



Figure 85. Oil companies modified the standard oblong box in a variety of ways, such as orienting the primary elevation at a right angle, as at this Chevron Station in Green River. Porcelain and glass façades were easily lit at night for around-the-clock sales appeal. Large display windows facilitated selling through point of purchase display. Credit: Sweetwater County Historical Museum

and cigarettes. Stations typically consisted of small offices, storage rooms, and restrooms.¹²⁴

Canopies had gone out of style in much of the United States during the era of the oblong box. Although absent

¹²² Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*, 146–150.

¹²³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 152.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 152–153.

Top: Figure 86. Hyperbolic paraboloid—sometimes called “butterfly” or “batwing”—canopies were a relatively common addition to oblong box stations in Wyoming during the 1960s. Most canopies extended around thirty or forty feet, covering two driveways and a single gas pump island, and were self-standing. This example is located in Lovell. Credit: Richard L. Collier



Bottom: Figure 87. The Antelope Truck Stop on Interstate 80 between Pine Bluffs and Cheyenne includes a large free-standing convenience store and a long, flat-roofed canopy that covers multiple gas islands. Credit: Erin N. Dorbin, 2013



from much new construction in the 1940s and 1950s, canopies returned larger and more dominant than ever after 1960. Canopies carried large signs and engendered a presence that oblong and small box stations could not achieve alone. In Wyoming hyperbolic paraboloid (sometimes called “butterfly” or “batwing”) canopies were among the most eye-catching. Other canopies were the more standard, flat-roof variety. Most canopies extended around thirty or forty feet, covering two driveways and a single gas pump island, and were self-standing (Figure 86).¹²⁵

By the end of the period covered by this report, many newly-constructed stations were little more than booths containing an attendant and gas pumps covered by long, flat-roofed canopies. This was in part a response to high gasoline prices—and smaller profits for oil companies—during the Oil Embargo of 1973–1974. The mid-1970s saw the rise of convenience stores, freestanding commercial buildings sited on the same lot as gas pumps and canopy (Figure 87).¹²⁶

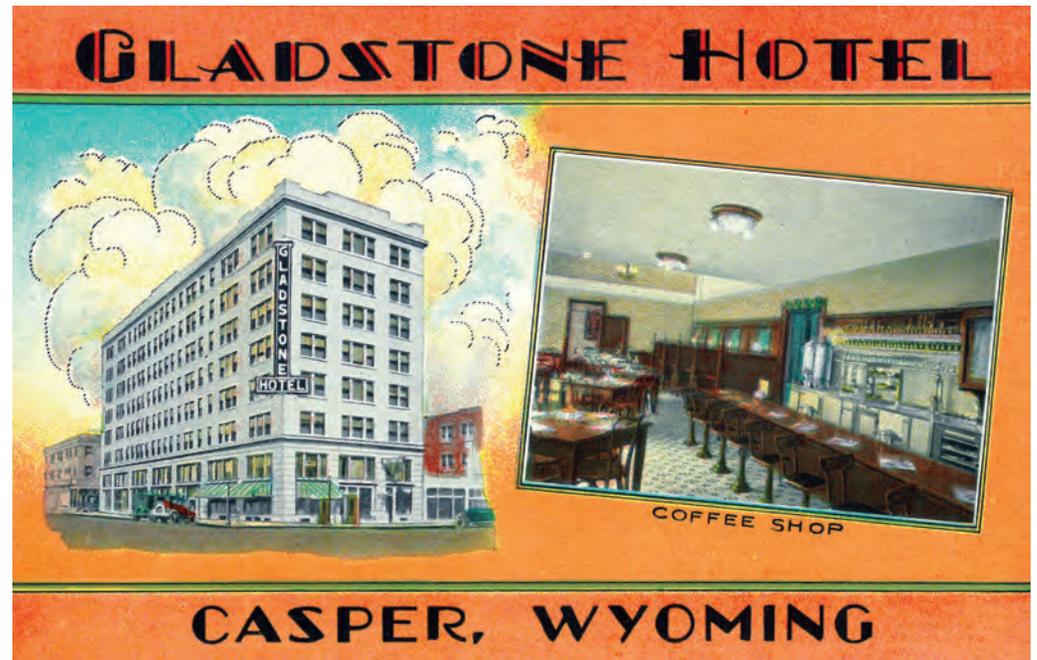
¹²⁵ Ibid., 153–154.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 154.

Quick-Service Food and Drink

The evolution of quick-service restaurants began many years before the automobile was introduced. Meals were hastily consumed at railroad station stops or prepared in tiny kitchens aboard railroad dining cars. The growing ranks of industrial workers often relied on quick meals prepared for lunch or supper breaks. By the turn of the twentieth century many white-collar workers also relied on fast lunches downtown.¹²⁷

For many traveling Americans, the first experiences with dining away from home likely took place in hotel dining rooms. At the turn of the twentieth century hotel dining rooms were grand spaces decorated in the French rococo, Italianate baroque, or Beaux Arts classicism. Flowered carpets, brocaded wallpaper, crystal chandeliers, and gilded mirrors were in vogue. Since many customers were businessmen, the menus specialized in heavy meals of red meat and alcohol. Hotel coffee shops offered lighter fare. The simplified interior decorations were more feminine and homey, and were more popular among women and families. The informality of coffee shops reflected the steady relaxing of social codes in the automobile age, particularly dress codes. These spaces were more appealing and appropriate to recreational motorists, who could not maintain a pristine appearance along dusty or muddy roads in open



cars. Often one side of the coffee shop was configured as a soda fountain, while the remainder of the room contained tables and chairs, and later booths. An adjacent commercial kitchen was typically partitioned from sight of the patrons (Figure 88).

Soda, defined as a drink of carbonated soda water mixed with flavored syrup, originated in the late 1830s. By 1874

Figure 88. Hotel coffee shops offered an informal dining experience. Often one side of the coffee shop was configured as a soda fountain, while the remainder of the room contained tables and chairs, and later booths. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

¹²⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 193–195.



Figure 89. The layout of casual eateries varied but was generally organized around a lunch counter and kitchen galley that together made a U-shape, a highly efficient plan that minimized servers' movements.

This postcard depicts Adams Dairy and Café in Rawlins. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

ice cream was being blended with soda water to produce ice cream soda. In addition to sweet treats, in the 1880s stores with soda fountains began to sell light food, particularly sandwiches, creating the prototype for a luncheonette. By the turn of the twentieth century the basic concept of a lunch counter, in which customers sat on stools at a counter facing the soda fountain, had emerged. Drug stores in particular embraced this new concept in trade, but lunch counters were also found in department stores, dime stores, and railroad stations. During Prohibition many saloons converted to soda fountains and luncheonettes.

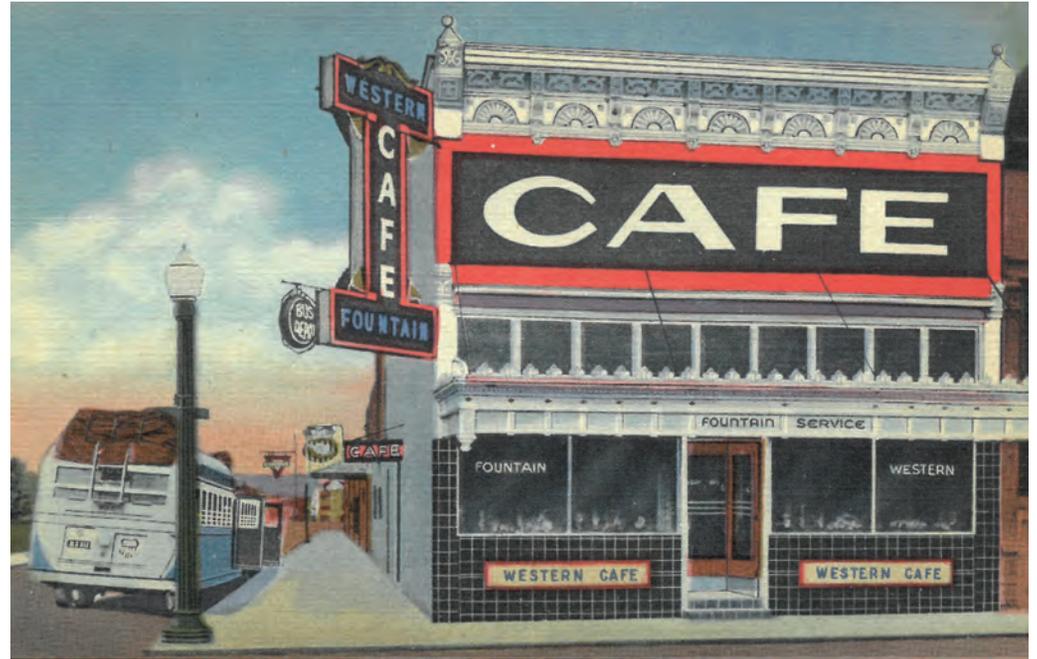
The concept of quick meals originated around coffee, treats like soft drinks and ice cream, and sandwiches, including novelties like hamburgers and hotdogs. This kind of recreational eating was often part of new leisure-time activities first enjoyed during the industrial era. The layout of casual eateries varied but was generally organized around a lunch counter and kitchen galley that together made a U-shape, a highly efficient plan that minimized servers' movements (Figure 89). Lunch counters remained central to informal dining in the United States for over fifty years and would have featured prominently in the daily meals of Wyoming tourists until at least the 1960s. Today, diners in Wyoming can still experience lunch-counter service in a handful of places, including Rose's Lariat and the Cloverleaf Café in Rawlins, Grub's in Rock Springs, and the Silver Spur Café in Sheridan. Most lunch counters and soda fountains were "mom-and-pop" operations. Often their dining services were linked to confectionary sales, including candies, baked goods, and fruit. Candy and baked goods would typically be made on the premises.¹²⁸

Downtown cafés were another dining option in the early twentieth century. Cafés were also organized spatially around a lunch counter with soda fountain, but more emphasis was placed on table service. Floor space often included booths, which allowed customers some privacy while they dined. The menu at most cafés was more extensive than at lunch counters. These restaurants

¹²⁸ Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 23–29, 31; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 195.

were often located within commercial blocks, and the standardized commercial space inside these preexisting storefronts shaped much of the restaurant organization. In the 1930s and after World War II many cafés replaced their standard commercial storefronts with wide expanses of glass. During dinner hours the lights within the restaurant clearly displayed the interior activity to passersby, creating a simple but immediate and effective form of advertising (Figure 90).¹²⁹

Outside of towns, early motorists in Wyoming could not reasonably expect to find many dining options. The Lincoln Highway road guide did not explicitly mention where meals could be purchased, unless there was not a hotel in the area. At the settlement of Archer (population 75 in 1924), the guide notes, “No hotel, but meals and lodging can be obtained.”¹³⁰ Elsewhere the guide reminds motorists not to be without food in the car between Cheyenne and Carson City, Nevada. The list of suggested provisions includes bacon, cans of peaches, pineapples, tomatoes, corn, and baked beans, eggs, bread, rice, potatoes, evaporated milk, cracked wheat, pickles, graham crackers, coffee, tea, and “fresh fruit, as often as possible.”¹³¹ Advertisements in the official guide to the Yellowstone Highway offer a glimpse of quick-service dining in the route’s larger towns around



1916. In Cody, for example, travelers could choose from among the Standard Restaurant (“Meals at All Hours”), Mrs. Chamberlin’s (“Good Home Cooking, Meals 50c”), The Bakery (“Lunch Goods and Groceries”), The Palace Market (“Lunch Meats for Travelers”), and the Cody Café (“Open Night and Day”).¹³²

Figure 90. Cafés were often located within commercial blocks. During dinner hours the lights within the restaurant clearly displayed the interior activity to passersby, creating a simple but immediate and effective form of advertising. This image is of the Western Café in Rock Springs. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

¹²⁹ Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food*, 31–32.

¹³⁰ *Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*, 411.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹³² *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association*, 125, 138.



Figure 91. Roadside stands offered walk-up service to a window but did not provide seating or any other public space inside the building. Roadside stands were often simple, shed-like buildings specializing in novelty foods. Albright's Lunch Counter in Casper, circa 1920. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

After World War I the estimated number of restaurants in the United States jumped 40 percent. An important change in social behavior—eating away from home—was contemporarily attributed to a greater number of men and women working away from home, the decline in use and availability of domestic help, and Prohibition, which caused

many saloons to convert to soda fountains or ice cream parlors. Technological developments of the era included advances in packing, storing, refrigerating, shipping, and preparing food, making cooking and selling meals to a large number of people easier. The popularity of eating out dovetailed with the tremendous rise in production and availability of the automobile. Restaurants made planning for a car trip easier, and cars made it possible for motorists to reach restaurants. Cars allowed restauranteurs to site eateries along well-traveled highways, where land remained relatively inexpensive.¹³³

In the 1910s the concept of take-away dining developed as soda fountains began to offer curbside service. Soda jerks responded to motorists who pulled their cars to the front of the building and honked to signal their arrival. Other roadside stands offered walk-up service to a window but did not provide seating or any other public space inside the building. Roadside stands were often simple, shed-like buildings specializing in novelty foods and had much in common with food stands the public had encountered at seaside boardwalks or at county fairs and rodeos. Curbside and walk-up service set precedent for the drive-in restaurants of the mid-twentieth century (Figure 91).¹³⁴

The word diner has come to signify a range of small, typically independent restaurants; however, the term

¹³³ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 195–196.

¹³⁴ Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food*, 42–43.

originally referred to modular buildings loosely patterned after railroad dining cars. In fact, many early diners were repurposed dining cars. Most diners carried elements of the Streamline Moderne style, a style that implies speed and efficiency and that was frequently applied to trains and automobiles. Originally an urban phenomenon catering to wage earners in search of the noon meal, in the 1930s diners began appearing along the nation's highways. Diners were some of the first quick-service restaurants to break away from older commercial districts and relocate to the roadside in easy reach of motorists. In 1932 an estimated four thousand "modular lunchrooms" existed nationwide. By 1952 the number had grown to five thousand (Figure 92).

Investing in a diner had financial advantages for would-be restaurateurs. In the early 1950s a forty-eight-foot diner could be purchased for \$36,500, while an eighty-foot unit cost sixty thousand dollars. Only a quarter of the purchase price was paid upfront—the rest followed in installments. Diners were towed to the commercial site by truck and were often not taxed as real property, but personal property. Owners were also able to take accelerated depreciation on these buildings. If a diner proved unprofitable in one location, it could be partially disassembled and moved to another location. Although diners were as a general rule independently owned and operated, they were also



Figure 92. Diners were some of the first quick-service restaurants to break away from older commercial districts and relocate to the roadside in easy reach of motorists. Most diners carried elements of the Streamline Moderne style, a style that implies speed and efficiency and that was frequently applied to trains and automobiles. Jack's Coffee Shop at Point of Rocks was most likely a modular building. Credit: Russell Rein, private collection

prefabricated modular units and as a group possessed great uniformity of appearance. This consistent presentation foreshadowed the model that future chain restaurants would adopt in creating branded packaging for their stores.¹³⁵

At least two diners remain in Wyoming. One is the Luxury Diner in Cheyenne, which at its core is a repurposed

¹³⁵ Ibid., 36–38.



Figure 93. The core of the Luxury Diner in Cheyenne is a repurposed streetcar retrofitted to serve as a diner after Cheyenne's streetcar system was retired. Credit: Richard L. Collier, 2017

streetcar retrofitted to serve as a diner after Cheyenne's streetcar system was retired (Figure 93). The second is an abandoned Valentine diner at Smitty's Stateline Truck Stop and Café in Pine Bluffs. Valentine Manufacturing, Inc. of Wichita, Kansas, produced eight-to-ten-seat diners operable by one or two people. Valentine diners were produced following World War II and were essentially small steel-framed boxes designed to be moved on flatbed trucks.

Smitty's State Line Café is an example of the Aristocrat model produced in the late 1940s. Designed by Wichita industrial engineer Richard Ten Eyck, the Aristocrat is an eight-stool model identifiable through the rounded parapet above the door and flanking buttresses.¹³⁶ Smitty's State Line Café carries serial number 591. Both diners were enlarged with later additions in order to accommodate more customers dining-in.

Dining has been linked to automobile-oriented lodging as early as the municipal campgrounds of the 1910s. Municipal campgrounds commonly gave tourists easy access to groceries and kitchen facilities, and sometimes included a coffee shop. When campgrounds privatized and quickly transformed into the earliest motor courts, coffee shops and cafés became important features of these commercial sites (Figure 94). In 1939 *Tourist Court Journal* reported that 47 percent of motor court and motel owners nationwide operated a café.¹³⁷ Based on the archival record created from historic postcards and photographs it was incredibly common for a Wyoming lodging property to offer some sort of food service, no matter how limited, as well as gas and basic automobile services. Many times a café was located adjacent to the lodging buildings, but other times a roadside entrepreneur owned a motor court or motel located at some distance from a Main Street café to which he would doubtless refer his lodgers.

¹³⁶ Kansas Historical Society, "Valentine Diners," Kansapedia (2014), <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/valentine-diners-introduction/18733> (accessed March 19, 2017).

¹³⁷ Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food*, 49.

In addition to the streamlined, quick-service diners and cafés located along Wyoming’s major highways, a number of substantial roadside businesses blurred the line between restaurant and bar and may have existed as one or the other at different times during their years of operation. Resembling lodges or wayside taverns, these larger restaurants were often constructed of peeled logs that would have appealed to vacationers in search of the “authentic” West. The Tunnel Inn near Story (Figure 95), Pete’s Rock-n-Rye in Evanston, and the Rustic Pine Tavern and Bar in Dubois are representative of this category of property. Similarly, a number of Wyoming’s famous bars did their best to convey an iconic sense of the popular West to tourists. The Million Dollar Cowboy Bar and the Silver Dollar Bar in Jackson, located as they are in one of Wyoming’s premier tourist towns, exemplify the effort to package an idealized western saloon experience for consumers.

Because of the prevalence of family vacations during the mid-twentieth century, many travelers and tourists needed eateries suitable to families with young children. Nationally, this type of family-oriented restaurant was typified by franchises like Howard Johnson’s. In the absence of Howard Johnson’s or other similar chain restaurants, several local takes on this concept developed in Wyoming, particularly along the U.S. Highway 30/Interstate 80 corridor. Examples include Adams Restaurant in Rawlins and Howard’s Café in Rock Springs (Figure 96). Typically, a family restaurant



had customers enter through a vestibule or into a small lobby where they could choose from among different types of dining experiences, most often including counter service in a coffee shop, table service in a restaurant, or cocktail service in a bar or lounge. The best place to experience this concept today is at Little America near Green River, where the separation of coffee shop and dining room remains clearly defined. Although many family restaurants in Wyoming offered generalized American food, towns like Rawlins and Rock Springs offered “Chinese-American” fare at restaurants like the Willow Inn Café and Sands Café.

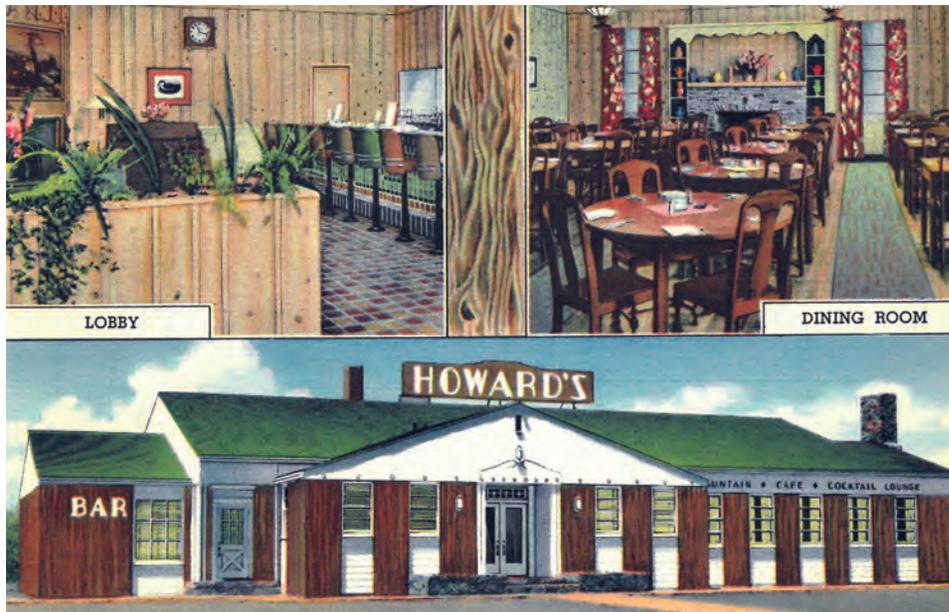
After World War II the first drive-in restaurants appeared. Drive-ins shared one salient feature: the canopy. Carhops

Figure 94. Coffee shops and cafés were important features of lodging properties. In 1939 *Tourist Court Journal* reported that 47 percent of motor court and motel owners nationwide operated a café. The Red and White Auto Court in Casper included a café and a service station. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



Top: Figure 95. Resembling lodges or wayside taverns, some larger restaurants were constructed of peeled logs that would have appealed to vacationers in search of the “authentic” West. Tunnel Inn, Story. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Bottom: Figure 96. Because of the prevalence of family vacations during the mid-twentieth century, many travelers and tourists needed eateries suitable to families with young children. Typically, a family restaurant allowed customers to choose from among different types of dining experiences, most often including counter service in a coffee shop, table service in a restaurant, or cocktail service in a bar or lounge. Howard’s Café in Rock Springs had a soda fountain, café, dining room, and cocktail lounge. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



delivered food to cars parked beneath the canopy for shade or protection from inclement weather. The food was intended to be consumed on site within the car (Figure 97). By 1964 an estimated 33,500 drive-in restaurants existed nationwide, though only 24,500 offered hot food. The remaining stores were beverage and ice cream purveyors. Drive-ins typically consisted of three spaces: the canopy-covered driveway with parking and call boxes, the kitchen, and the carhop station. Labor costs at drive-ins averaged as much as 25 percent of sales in the early 1960s; as a result, many drive-ins installed telephones or speaker boxes that allowed customers to call in their own orders. All that remained for carhops to do was deliver food to the cars.¹³⁸ Several historic drive-in restaurants are still fixtures of various Wyoming communities. Three A&W’s remain statewide and are located in Worland, Lander, and Casper.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 54–56.

Only the Worland location retains its original franchise. As of this writing, the Lander A&W houses the Breadboard sub shop, and the Casper store is home to Shifters burger restaurant. Other non-franchised drive-in restaurants remain in Lander, Newcastle, and Lusk.

Today, chain fast-food restaurants likely supply a large portion of travelers' diets as they cross Wyoming. Although many recognizable chains had their origins in the post-World War II suburbs, corporate fast food, just like corporate lodging, had a significant advantage over mom-and-pop businesses after the construction of the interstate highway system. Franchises having corporate backing were better able to afford high real estate prices at interstate interchanges, and motorists were increasingly obliged to venture away from the immediate interchange area to find local dining options. Despite the prevalence of chain restaurants today, very little information was uncovered during the survey about early fast-food franchises. With the exception of three A&W drive-in restaurants and a former Tastee-Freez in Casper, no historic chain restaurants were documented during fieldwork. In addition, archival research has produced a 1969 photograph of the Arctic Circle in Cheyenne and a couple of postcards featuring Village Inn Pancake Houses. The development of chain restaurants in Wyoming remains poorly understood.

A&W is a national fast-food chain that developed in the 1920s around a new, supposedly improved, recipe for root beer. Three recognizable former A&Ws remain in



Figure 97. The first drive-in restaurants appeared after World War II. Carhops delivered food to cars parked beneath the canopy for shade or protection from inclement weather. The food was intended to be consumed on site within the car. The Drift Inn drive-in restaurant in Cheyenne, circa 1960. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

Wyoming. All three retain their drive-in canopies. The Lander building, most likely constructed in the 1950s, features a tell-tale wedge sign, while the Worland location, probably constructed in the late 1960s or early 1970s, has a distinctive steel “pagoda” roof. The Casper location retains a complete Burger Family, including Papa, Mama, Teen, and Baby Burger (Figure 98). The Burger Family was introduced in the early 1960s to help advertise the different hamburger sizes available at A&W. The statues are constructed of fiberglass. Papa Burger is the tallest, measuring eight feet in height.

The circa 1955 former Tastee-Freez in Casper was converted to a hamburger restaurant and is now vacant. Comprised of a small-box store with large glass-paneled façade and a flat roof that slopes to the rear, it is very similar in appearance to the Arctic Circle photographed in 1969 in south Cheyenne (Figure 99). Tastee-Freez is a national soft-serve ice cream chain that was based in Chicago when the



Figure 98. The A&W Burger Family at a former A&W drive-in restaurant in Casper. Credit: Richard L. Collier, 2014

Casper store was constructed. Arctic Circle is a regional burger-and-shake restaurant that grew out of the Salt Lake City area.

Lastly, the Village Inn Pancake House (now simply Village Inn) is a chain of casual-dining restaurants that was based in Denver during the end of the period covered by this context. A store was erected in Cheyenne in 1963 alongside the new Downtown Motor Inn. Archival research has demonstrated that a contemporary Village Inn was opened in Casper (Figure 100).



Top: Figure 99. This Arctic Circle in Cheyenne was an early chain restaurant consisting of a small-box store with large glass-paneled façade and a flat roof that sloped to the rear. Photograph circa 1969. Credit: Wyoming State Archives



Bottom: Figure 100. This postcard depicts the first Village Inn Pancake House to open in Casper. The original Village Inn opened in Denver in 1958, and the chain began franchising in the early 1960s. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Attractions: Tourist Attractions

In addition to the principal needs of travelers—lodging, automobile service, and food—a number of other commercial enterprises existed during the period covered by this report. Loosely categorized here as “attractions,” this category includes souvenir stands and curio shops, historic sites, and roadside attractions. These properties often served as diversions in route to a major destination. Nationally, there were once many examples of programmatic or novelty architecture meant to entice tourists to stop and spend money; however, Wyoming does not appear to have developed concentrations of whimsical landmarks or “World’s Largest” attractions. Nevertheless, there were a number of sites that broke up the long, windswept vistas of the state for travelers in search of detours.

The earliest tourist attractions in Wyoming were not developed with motorists in mind. Travelers along the early Lincoln Highway stopped to see and be photographed with Ames Monument, a sixty-foot-tall, random ashlar, native granite pyramid that marks the highest elevation on the First Transcontinental Railroad (Figure 102). In 1880 Henry Hobson Richardson designed the monument dedicated to Oakes Ames and Oliver Ames Jr., financiers of the railroad. Augustus Saint-Gaudens chiseled bas-reliefs of the Ames brothers fixed within the east and west sides of



the pyramid. Similarly, Lincoln Highway motorists stopped to see Fort Bridger, a nineteenth-century fur trading outpost, critical supply point on the Oregon and Mormon trails, and military post during the Utah War. Eventually many of the old stone buildings at the fort were converted to cafés and curio shops (Figure 103). The old commanding officer’s quarters had become the Rochford Hotel some years before.¹³⁹ In 1925 the Rochford family built the Black and Orange Cabins in response to the growing demand for motor courts (Figure 58).

Figure 101. Roadside enterprises like the Buffalo Bill Court in Cody sold tourists film, moccasins, Indian jewelry, curios, and any other souvenirs they might desire from their vacation in the West. Postcard circa 1955. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

¹³⁹ Sarah Allaback, Ethan Carr, and James F. O’Gorman, “Ames Monument,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (Amherst, MA, 2015); Bill Barnhart, “Fort Bridger,” National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form (Cheyenne, 1969).

Top: Figure 102.
Auto tourists at Ames
Monument, circa 1915.
Credit: University of
Michigan Library Digital
Collections, Lincoln
Highway Digital Image
Collection



Bottom: Figure 103.
Many of the old stone
buildings at Fort Bridger
were converted to cafés
and curio shops after
the establishment of the
Lincoln Highway. Postcard
circa 1930. Credit: Russell
Rein, private collection



One of the first attractions developed specifically for auto tourists is the Fossil Cabin, located five miles southeast of the town of Medicine Bow (Figure 104). The cabin is sited in close proximity to both Como Bluff, the site of several major dinosaur specimen discoveries during the late nineteenth century, and the circa 1924 route of the Lincoln Highway, which became U.S. Highway 30 in the late 1920s. Thomas Boylan, builder of the Fossil Cabin, filed on a homestead in 1908 near Como Bluff. He collected dinosaur bones over a period of seventeen years, and when he decided to sell gas to cross-country motorists on the highway that had been constructed near his claim, his initial plan was to assemble a complete skeleton that would entice travelers to stop at his pumps. After a dinosaur expert at the nearby University of Wyoming explained that his fossil collection did not contain all the bones needed to construct a complete specimen, Boylan used the fossilized bone to build the roadside attraction still standing today.

Constructed in 1932, the Fossil Cabin is a one-story, rectangular building measuring twenty-eight feet by eighteen feet. The walls are constructed primarily of dinosaur bones mined from nearby Como Bluff, one of the richest dinosaur fossil beds in the world, and a small amount of rock. A purported total of 5,796 bones are laid in random courses with wide mortar joints. The Fossil Cabin was part of a growing national fascination with dinosaurs in the 1930s, evidenced also in Sinclair Oil Company's decision to adopt a dinosaur as their logo in 1932 and in the Works Progress Administration's Dinosaur Park in

Rapid City, South Dakota, a project completed in 1936. The Fossil Cabin appears to have been the only dinosaur-themed attraction in Wyoming during the period covered by this report.

It is unclear if Boylan charged admission to the Fossil Cabin, which opened in time for the 1933 tourist season, but he sold candy and soft drinks as well as gas. Museum display cases in the cabin contained fossils, Indian artifacts, and miscellaneous relics. As many as seven other gas stations are said to have operated within the eighteen-mile stretch of highway between the towns of Rock River and Medicine Bow, so the Fossil Cabin was undoubtedly essential to Boylan's ability to compete in a saturated market. On April 26, 1938 Robert L. Ripley's "Believe It or Not" cartoon featured the Fossil Cabin in the nationally-syndicated strip. Ripley called it "the world's oldest cabin." Boylan advertised it as the "Creation Museum," the "World's Oldest Building," the "Building that Used to Walk," the "Como Bluff Dinosaurium," and "The Strangest Building in the World."

Today the cabin lingers as a relic of the early numbered highway system and a casualty of the modern interstate, which diverted cross-country traffic to a more southerly route along Interstate 80 in the late 1960s. Boylan operated the Fossil Cabin Museum and gas station until



he died in 1947. His widow Grace kept the business going until 1974. In 1970 Interstate 80 was completed twenty miles south of US 30, and traffic declined precipitously along the older cross-country route. Nationally, many tourist attractions suffered from the introduction of the interstate highway system.¹⁴⁰

A rare example of programmatic architecture in Wyoming is the Warwhoop, a former souvenir stand that has been

Figure 104. The Fossil Cabin near Medicine Bow was one of the first Wyoming attractions developed specifically for auto tourists. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

¹⁴⁰ Nancy Weidel, "The Fossil Cabin," National Register of Historic Places Inventory /Nomination Form (Cheyenne, 2008).



Figure 105. The Warwhoop, a former souvenir stand moved from its original location west of Pine Bluffs, is a rare example of programmatic architecture in Wyoming. Credit: Russell Rein, private collection

repurposed as housing (Figure 105). The Warwhoop is a large, concrete teepee originally located west of Pine Bluffs on U.S. Highway 30. Modern Interstate 80 courses right through its former location on the old numbered route. Owners Steve and Pearl James operated the Warwhoop—more commonly referred to as “the Teepee”—until their land was purchased for the new interstate in the 1960s. The Teepee is now located south of Interstate 80 near the Egbert interstate interchange (see page 8). While souvenir stands like the Warwhoop traded on simplistic images of the iconic West, often by appropriating Native American culture,

other tourist shops emphasized Wyoming products (Figure 106). In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s Rawlins’ souvenir shops specialized in jade, and lodging properties like the Bel Air Inn, the Quality Courts Motel, and the Jade Lodge sold jade in their gift shops. Similarly, the Star Valley Swiss Cheese Company advertised their creamery in Thayne as a suitable diversion for travelers on U.S. Highway 89. Both jade and Swiss cheese were promoted through the distribution of postcards and through free samples provided by the Wyoming Commerce and Industry Commission.¹⁴¹



Figure 106. Native Wyoming products were an important type of souvenir. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Rawlins’ souvenir shops specialized in jade. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

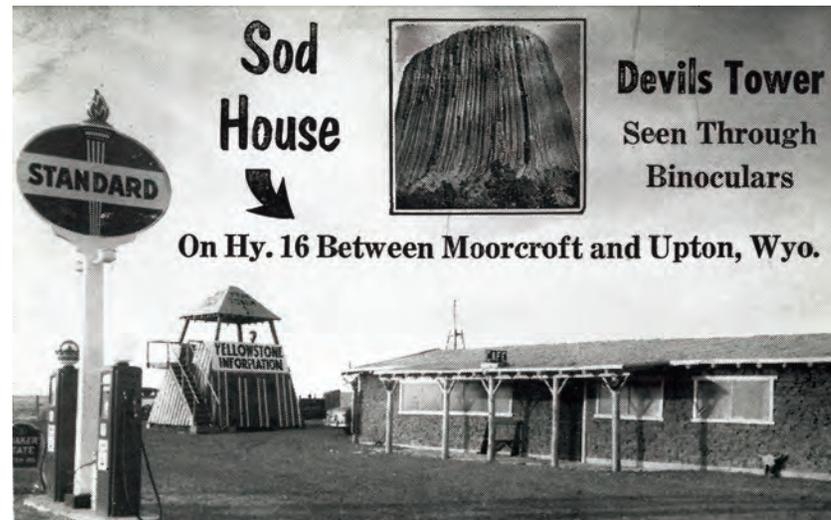
¹⁴¹ Commerce and Industry Commission, *Third Biennial Report, 1951–1952* (Cheyenne, 1952), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library; Commerce and Industry Commission, *Fourth Biennial Report, 1953–1954* (Cheyenne, 1954), RG 0268, Wyoming State Library, 11.

Along U.S. Highway 16 between Moorcroft and Upton, the Willey family constructed a circa 1949 replica sod house to entice travelers to stop at their gas station, lunch counter, souvenir stand, and campground (Figure 107). Additionally, the Willeys offered a free viewing platform from which travelers could spot Devils Tower twenty-five miles to the northeast. When Interstate 90 was completed in the 1960s, it passed the sod house by three-quarters of a mile to the north.¹⁴²

The circa 1948 Teton Mystery near Hoback Junction is one of perhaps a dozen similar tourist attractions across the nation promising to provide paying customers with an experience outside the laws of physics (Figure 108). The Teton Mystery property includes a little building built crookedly into the side of a steep hill. Landscaping around the exterior and alterations to the interior disguise the fact that the house sits at an angle, creating the illusion that the interior space allows occupants to stand or lean at impossible angles and that water flows upwards and round objects roll uphill.

Top: Figure 107. This circa 1949 replica of a sod house enticed travelers to stop at the Willey family's gas station, lunch counter, souvenir stand, and campground on the way to Devils Tower. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Bottom: Figure 108. The circa 1948 Teton Mystery promised paying customers an experience outside the laws of physics. Credit: Richard L. Collier, 2014



¹⁴² "Greetings from the Old Sod Shanty of Upton, Wyoming, 1965," *Weston County Gazette* (Upton, WY), March 5, 2015.

Attractions: Landscape Features

Many tourists in Wyoming arrived in search of the state's showcase natural wonders: Old Faithful, the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, the Tetons, and, in increasing numbers in the 1960s, Devils Tower. While these natural landmarks may have been their chief destinations, many other landscape features provided travelers with an opportunity to stop the car, snap a few photos, and marvel at scenery very different from what they saw at home. A few of Wyoming's natural attractions are identified below.

Figure 109. Interstate travelers view Tree in the Rock, 1970. Credit: Wyoming State Archives



Tree in the Rock (Figure 109)

Tree in the Rock (or “Lone Tree” or “the Old Pine Tree”) is a limber pine growing from soil trapped between several Sherman granite boulders. In 1867 the Union Pacific Railroad diverted its tracks to avoid the tree, setting a precedent followed by the Lincoln Highway, U.S. Highway 30, and Interstate 80. I-80's east- and west-bound lanes flank the tree to the north and south, and the Wyoming Department of Transportation maintains a parking area in the highway median so travelers can pull out of traffic, park, and view the tree. In 1941 the Work Projects Administration's (WPA's) guide to Wyoming speculated that the tree “is possibly the most-photographed object in Wyoming.”¹⁴³

Sherman Summit

At 8,640 feet above sea level, Sherman Summit is the highest point on the Lincoln Highway, U.S. Highway 30, and Interstate 80. The 1924 Lincoln Highway road guide noted that on clear days, Pikes Peak could be glimpsed 175 miles to the south.¹⁴⁴ The archival record reveals that early motorists stopped to take photographs at the point (Figure 39). The famous Summit Tavern, now abandoned, was located here. In 1959 a twelve-and-a-half-foot-tall bust of Abraham Lincoln resting on a thirty-foot-tall granite

¹⁴³ Work Projects Administration, *Wyoming: A Guide to Its History, Highways, and People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 232.

¹⁴⁴ *Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*, 414.

pedestal was placed on Sherman Hill overlooking U.S. Highway 30. Sculpted by Robert Russin of the University of Wyoming, the monument was placed in honor of Abraham Lincoln's one-hundred-and-fiftieth birthday in conjunction with the highway that bears his name. When Interstate 80 was completed in 1969, the Lincoln Monument was moved to the new rest area (Figure 110). Today the State of Wyoming maintains a rest area and seasonal visitors' center at the summit.

Continental Divide

Travelers along the Lincoln Highway, U.S. Highway 30, and Interstate 80 crossed the Continental Divide twice between Rawlins and Rock Springs; however, the first crossing west of Rawlins was monetized through the addition of a gas station, café, and assorted other commercial enterprises intended to help travelers frame this natural landmark. The WPA guide noted that the divide is approached so gradually "it is difficult to recognize the highest point,"¹⁴⁵ which is 7,110 feet above sea level.

Tollgate Rock (Figure 12)

Tollgate Rock and the Green River Palisades have been some of the most depicted natural features in Wyoming paintings and photographs since the 1870s. The rock got its name when Mormon emigrants en route to Salt Lake



City cut a passage through rock and began charging a toll to those who passed. The circa 1924 route of the Lincoln Highway and U.S. Highway 30 took full advantage of the vista, running between the palisades (sheer buff sandstone cliffs) and the river.¹⁴⁶ Interstate 80 runs "behind" Tollgate Rock as viewed from US 30.

Figure 110. Robert Russin's bust of Abraham Lincoln being placed in its second and current location at the Summit Rest Area, December 1968. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

¹⁴⁵ WPA, *Wyoming*, 242.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 246–247.



Figure 111. A motorist atop Church Buttes, circa 1925. Credit: Russell Rein, private collection

Church Buttes (Figure 111)

Church Buttes is an eroded sandstone butte formation that was a campsite for Mormon emigrants, a relay station for the Pony Express, and a landmark on the Lincoln Highway and U.S. Highway 30 in rural Uinta County. Standing seventy-five feet above the surrounding landscape, the blue and black sandstone cliffs are said to resemble a cathedral.¹⁴⁷ Church Buttes was bypassed by Interstate 80.

Eagle Rock (Figures 4–5)

Eagle Rock is a rock outcrop on the Lincoln Highway and U.S. Highway 30 in rural Uinta County. It is located about twelve miles from Evanston on Uinta County Road 180. It was bypassed by Interstate 80.

Hell's Half Acre (Figure 112)

Hell's Half Acre is a large scarp located about forty miles west of Casper along the Yellowstone Highway and U.S. Highway 20 where wind and water have acted on soft bedrock to create a badlands. The scarp encompasses about 320 acres of deep ravines, caves, rock formations, and hard-packed eroded earth. Natrona County historically maintained Hell's Half Acre as a public park.¹⁴⁸ Prior to 2005 a restaurant, motel, and campground operated at the edge of the scarp.

Big Horn Hot Springs (Figure 113)

The Big Horn Hot Springs in Thermopolis are part of Wyoming's first state park. Located on the Yellowstone Highway and U.S. Highway 20, the hot springs pour out 18.6 million gallons of 135 degree water every day. The water was once thought to treat rheumatism, blood and skin diseases, kidney problems, and infantile paralysis. The hot springs were part of the Wind River Indian Reservation

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 261.

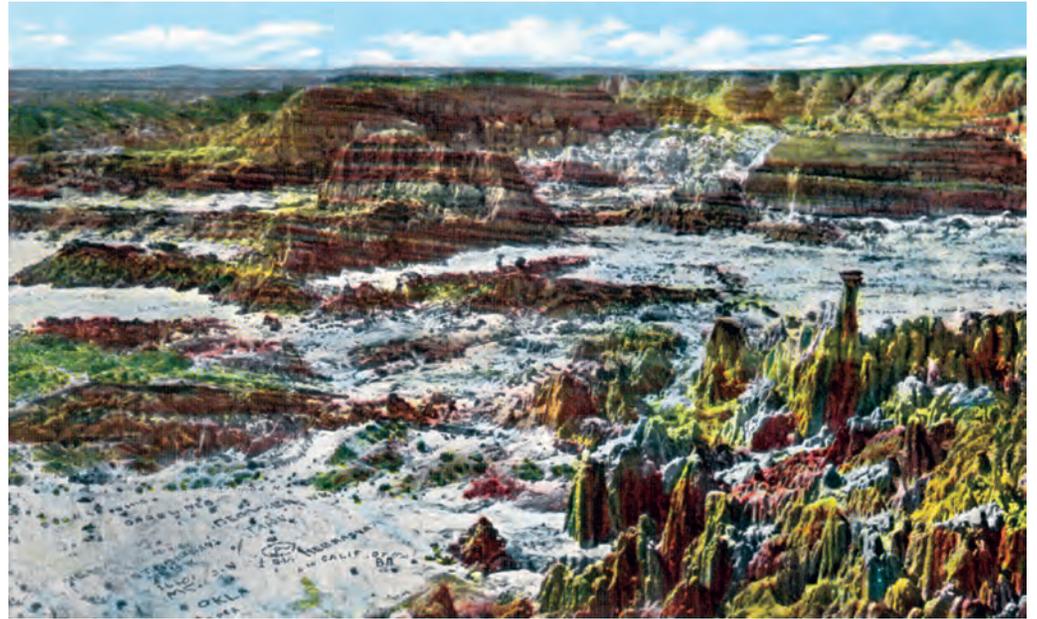
¹⁴⁸ David R. Lageson and Darwin R. Spearing, *Roadside Geology of Wyoming* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1988), 146–147; WPA, *Wyoming*, 326; *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association*, 88.

prior to 1896; by treaty, the State of Wyoming maintains a free bathhouse to fulfill the Federal Government's promise to Chief Washakie of the Eastern Shoshone.¹⁴⁹

Infrastructure, Wayfinding, and Highway Beautification

The purpose of the survey activities undertaken between 2013 and 2016 was not to ground-truth the routes of the early named highways, but to record the buildings, structures, and landscapes associated with cross-country travel in the twentieth century. Previous survey efforts have established the routes of the early named highways, though a few gaps in our knowledge remain. The modern Lincoln Highway Association has done a commendable job of trailing and recording the earliest routes of their highway and maintains an excellent online map. In 1993 SHPO staff Todd Thibodeau and Richard Collier drove the length of the Lincoln Highway in Wyoming with the primary objective of assessing the integrity of individual road segments (Figure 114). They also photographed associated properties, including infrastructure like bridges, underpasses, and culverts. Members of organizations like TRACKS Across Wyoming and staff at local history museums along the Lincoln Highway corridor have also been active in scholarship and education efforts. The Yellowstone Highway and the Black and Yellow Trail

¹⁴⁹ WPA, *Wyoming*, 331; *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association*, 94, 101, 104.



Top: Figure 112. Undated postcard of Hell's Half Acre, including the "visitors register" where tourists would cut or build the names of their hometowns and states in the bottom of the badlands' floor. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

Bottom: Figure 113. Circa 1915 postcard of motorists at the Big Horn Hot Springs in Thermopolis. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

Figure 114. A segment of the Lincoln Highway in rural Carbon County photographed during the 1993 survey. Credit: Richard L. Collier



routes are less well documented, but many segments have been field-recorded as part of Section 106 undertakings and evaluated as to their National Register of Historic Places eligibility. The routes of the numbered highways and interstate highways have been captured in the archival record of Wyoming's transportation department.

Because of prior and ongoing fieldwork focused on recording historic roadbeds, recent survey efforts were limited to buildings, structures, and landscapes within the highway corridors. Highway infrastructure was included in this survey. Below, a list of significant structures highlights some of the infrastructure recorded during the survey.

Infrastructure, Wayfinding, and Highway Beautification: Bridges

48LA3336, Pershing Boulevard Railroad Bridge (Figure 115)

Constructed in 1928, this 132-foot-long, twenty-two-foot-wide steel I-beam bridge allows the Lincoln Highway/U.S. Highway 30 to cross the Union Pacific Railroad in east Cheyenne. Concrete columns support both ends of the bridge, and steel posts and beams set in concrete footers support the middle of the platform. The bridge retains an original cast-iron pipe railing.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Wyoming Cultural Property Form, Site 48LA3336, Pershing Boulevard Railroad Bridge. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

48CR4293, Bridge over North Platte River (Figure 116)

This 180-foot single-span, rigid-connected steel Parker through-truss bridge conveys the circa 1924 Lincoln Highway over the North Platte River near Fort Fred Steele. The contract for the bridge was awarded in 1929 as part of Federal Aid Project 186B.¹⁵¹ This historic bridge is among the most visible in the state, as this later route of the Lincoln Highway (now a county-maintained road) runs parallel to Interstate 80. Wyoming's transportation department constructed a state-maintained rest area adjacent to the bridge in the late 1960s.

48SW18892, Peru Cutoff Bridge

In 1924 this simple-span, riveted plate deck truss bridge allowed the Lincoln Highway to be rerouted over the Union Pacific Railroad tracks west of Green River. The bridge was 123 feet long, twenty-two feet wide, and was suspended nearly thirty feet above the railroad tracks. The original route of the Lincoln Highway had crossed the railroad in Green River, then utilized part of the Overland Trail through Telephone Canyon. The 1924 rerouting was a significant improvement over the Telephone Canyon route. The bridge remained part of the Lincoln Highway/U.S. Highway 30 until another reroute in 1943, after which it was primarily used by local traffic.¹⁵² The Wyoming Department of Transportation replaced the historic bridge in 2016.



Top: Figure 115. Pershing Boulevard Railroad Bridge. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2014



Bottom: Figure 116. Bridge over North Platte River. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2013

¹⁵¹ National American Engineering Record Inventory Form, 48CR4293, Bridge over North Platte. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

¹⁵² Wyoming Cultural Property Form, Site 48UT18992, Peru Cutoff Bridge over Union Pacific Railroad. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

Top: Figure 117. The Lincoln Highway over the Blacks Fork Bridge. Credit: Richard L. Collier, 2012

Bottom: Figure 118. Yellowstone Highway Bridge. Credit: Richard L. Collier, 1997



48UT2677, Blacks Fork Bridge (Figure 117)

This bridge replaced a timber trestle bridge in 1921 as part of Federal Aid Project 17. It was one of the first concrete T-girder bridges built to the transportation department's standard plans. The bridge was constructed from two simple spans fifty-two feet long, having a total length of 106 feet and a deck width of twenty-one feet. The deck was gravel-surfaced. Top-mounted, round steel pipe rails protected Lincoln Highway motorists from plunging into the Blacks Fork River near Fort Bridger. The abutments consisted of full retaining walls with swept-back wings on spread footings.¹⁵³ The Wyoming Department of Transportation replaced the historic bridge in 2014.

48UT1288 and 48UT1289

In 1930 a pair of single-span, rigid-connected steel Warren pony truss bridges were constructed to convey the Lincoln Highway over the Blacks Fork River in rural Uinta County. The bridges are now located on a county-maintained road north of Interstate 80. The bridges were built to Wyoming State Highway Department standard drawing 120.¹⁵⁴ The bridges were in use for transcontinental travel for only a short time; U.S. Highway 30 rerouted the travel corridor around 1932 in this part of the state.

¹⁵³ Wyoming Cultural Property Form, Site 48UT2677, Uinta County Road 221 Bridge. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

¹⁵⁴ National American Engineering Record Inventory Form, Site 48UT1288, Bridge over Black's Fork River. On file at Wyoming Cultural Records Office; National American Engineering Record Inventory Form, Site 48UT1289, Bridge over Black's Fork River. On file at Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

48FR3984

This one-lane reinforced concrete bridge and box culvert spans Badwater Creek along the Lost Cabin to Arminto Road immediately southeast of Lost Cabin on the Yellowstone Highway. The bridge is fifteen feet long, seven feet wide, and is suspended approximately eight feet above Badwater Creek. The poured concrete sides and supports include a “1918” date stamp on the interior of the northern support. The deck has a paved surface.

48CO2616, Yellowstone Highway Bridge

(Figure 118)

This five-span, concrete reinforced, cantilevered bridge was 416 feet long and carried the Yellowstone Highway over the North Platte River in Douglas. Construction began in September 1922 as part of Federal Aid Project 119 and concluded in June 1923. The bridge was a concrete deck girder structure in which the girders were carried continuously over the piers. The deck was originally twenty feet wide and had concrete railings and bridge lamps. At the time of construction, the bridge was an uncommon example of large-scale use of concrete construction by the Wyoming Highway Department, which considered it “one of the finest bridges in the state.” Most bridges of the same age were metal truss or timber. In 1953 the width of the bridge was expanded to thirty feet in order to accommodate

contemporary vehicles.¹⁵⁵ The Wyoming Department of Transportation replaced the historic bridge in 2007.

Infrastructure, Wayfinding, and Highway Beautification: Underpasses

48LA3301, Lincoln Highway Underpass (Figure 119)

This two-tube reinforced concrete underpass conveyed east- and west-bound motor traffic beneath the Colorado & Southern Railroad in west Cheyenne. Historic graffiti has been scratched into the interior walls. The earliest date observed is 1914.



Figure 119. Lincoln Highway Underpass, Cheyenne, circa 1915. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

¹⁵⁵ Wyoming Cultural Property Form, Site 48CO2616, Yellowstone Highway Bridge. On file at the Wyoming Cultural Records Office.

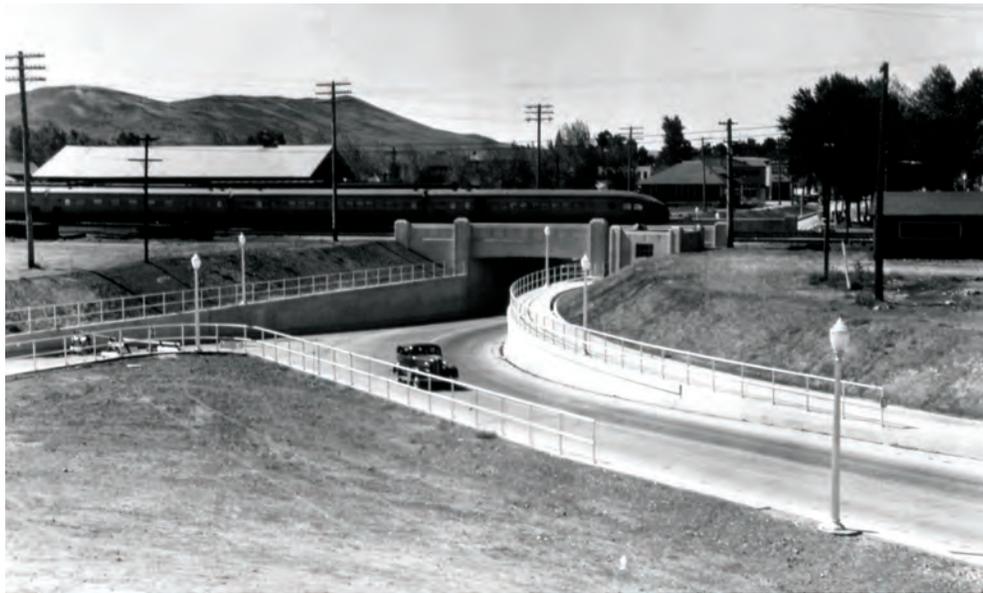
48UT2909, Lincoln Highway Underpass

This reinforced concrete tube allowed motorists to drive beneath the Union Pacific Railroad rather than cross it at grade. It is date-stamped 1920. The underpass is located about eighteen miles east of Evanston if driving on Uinta County Road 180.

Figure 120. Evanston Underpass, circa 1937.
Credit: Wyoming State Archives

48UT2920, Evanston Underpass (Figure 120)

In 1937 this underpass in central Evanston was constructed to keep motorists from crossing the Union



Pacific Railroad grade. The overpass has minimal Art Deco-style characteristics.

Infrastructure, Wayfinding, and Highway Beautification: Wayfinding

48UT2920, Lincoln Highway Marker (Figure 121)

Immediately east of Lyman, there is a concrete Lincoln Highway marker placed on September 1, 1928. Although several other markers may be observed along the highway corridor in Wyoming, this marker is believed to be the only one of its kind in the state in its original location. (In other states, most Lincoln Highway markers have also been moved, mostly due to highway widening, traffic accidents, or vandalism.) Following the establishment of the numbered U.S. Highway system, the historic Lincoln Highway Association resolved to disband. In 1928 the association decided to empty its coffers and commissioned an architect to design a concrete post as a memorial to Abraham Lincoln. Some three thousand of these markers were cast. Each marker was seven feet long and weighed about 275 pounds. Colored concrete was poured into voids on the face of each marker, forming the red, white, and blue highway logo. A thin bronze medallion bearing a bas relief of Lincoln was also set in each face. On both sides of the post, arrows indicated whether the Lincoln Highway went straight or turned ahead. On September 1 Boy Scouts



Figure 121. Lincoln Highway Marker. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2013

all across the route set posts at an average of one per mile between New York and San Francisco.¹⁵⁶ Like many other markers, the Lyman marker has lost its Lincoln medallion.

Infrastructure, Wayfinding, and Highway Beautification: Highway Beautification

In 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson, at the urging of his wife Lady Bird Johnson, signed into law the Highway Beautification Act (HBA). There were three major goals of this legislation, all aimed at the nation's interstate highways and other primary roads: to remove commercial billboards, to clean up or screen junkyards and dumps from view, and to encourage landscaping and scenic enhancement, particularly by establishing more rest areas and roadside parks. Nearly a decade after President Eisenhower had signed the Federal Aid Highway Act authorizing the Interstate Highway System, many Americans including Mrs. Johnson had become concerned about unsightly industrial waste and clusters of large commercial billboards distracting from the natural scenic beauty along the nation's primary roads.

The urge to regulate the roadside landscape was not a new issue in the 1960s. As early as 1909 the Office of Public Roads (the forerunner to today's Federal Highway Administration) had declared,

No matter how smooth and well constructed [sic] the traveled road may be, if the roadsides are not

¹⁵⁶ Gregory M. Franzwa, *The Lincoln Highway: Wyoming, Vol. 3* (Tucson, AZ: The Patrice Press, 1999), 52.

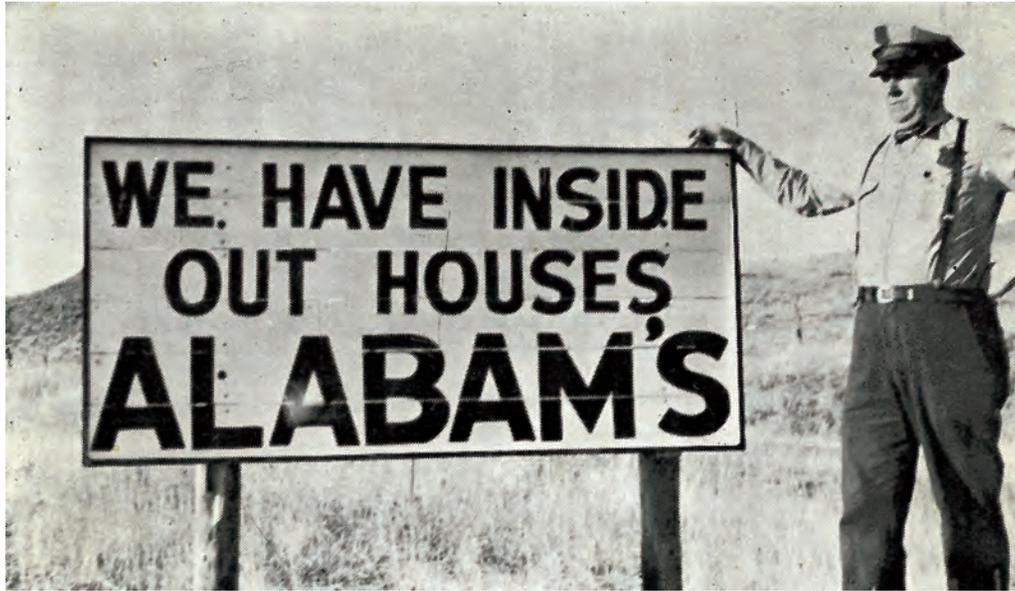


Figure 122. Prior to the Highway Beautification Act, entrepreneur Ned “Alabam” Deloney placed billboards for hundreds of miles on highways approaching his gas station, restaurant, and general store in Buffalo. He is pictured here with his famous “inside out houses” billboard. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

cared for, the highway as a whole will not give a good impression. All rubbish should be removed; the excavations should be filled and embankments smoothed and planted with grass wherever it will grow. Unsightly brush should be cut and grubbed out . . . All trees that are ornamental or which have value as shade trees should be preserved and protected.¹⁵⁷

Other state- and national-level transportation agencies declared commercial billboards to be unsightly and distracting for drivers, but short of a few financial incentives to states that would agree to regulate their placement, little progress was made in “beautifying” the nation’s highways during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁸ In 1964 the Wyoming Highway Commission’s biennial report from District 3 noted, “An intensive effort has been made during the past two years to clean up commercial sign encroachments on the highway right of way.”¹⁵⁹

Archival photographs reveal that the named and numbered highways were lined with eye-catching advertisements left wherever a business owner deemed most advantageous and wherever he could find a landowner willing to accept rent in exchange for a billboard on his land (Figure 122). Because the named and numbered highways were open roadways with relatively low speed limits, drivers could enter and exit almost anywhere they pleased. Commercial developers took advantage of the miles of inexpensive land all along the nation’s highways, meaning that motorists could not avoid driving through commercial strips, even if they wanted to.

The interstate highway system with its defined entry and exit points at established interchanges altered motorists’

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Kathleen A. Bergeron, “The Environmental First Lady” *Public Roads* 71, no. 5 (March/April 2008), <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/08mar/03.cfm> (Accessed March 26, 2017).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Wyoming State Highway Commission, *Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report, 1962–1964* (Cheyenne, 1964), RG 0045, Wyoming State Library, 62. District 3 corresponds to all or portions of Teton, Lincoln, Uinta, Sublette, and Sweetwater counties.

pattern of driving through commercial strips. In the late 1950s and 1960s small business owners found themselves in need of commercial advertising more than ever. Billboards not only advised motorists of upcoming commercial attractions, but now had to convince drivers to leave the highway at a defined point and drive several blocks out of their way to reach the older commercial strips on the bypassed U.S. Highways. The HBA could hardly have come at a worse time for small business owners in this respect. *Wyoming Motel News* came out strongly opposed to the removal of commercial billboards, citing the problems mom-and-pop motel owners were already having in the interstate age. In the May 1966 issue the editors ran the complete statement that Frank Norris Jr., Director of the Wyoming Travel Commission, made during a public hearing in Cheyenne that month.¹⁶⁰

Despite the fears of small business owners and tourism agencies, it can be difficult to assess the ultimate effect that the HBA had on outdoor commercial advertising. Certainly the nation's primary road system today retains plenty of commercial billboards. The HBA has been widely criticized. While some believe it to be needlessly restrictive, other interest groups believe the act has not done enough to declutter the nation's roadsides.¹⁶¹ In the early 1970s, faced

with the threat of losing 10 percent of federal highway funding if non-compliant, the Forty-First Wyoming Legislature passed the Outdoor Advertising Act to govern how the Wyoming Highway Department dealt with this aspect of highway beautification. *Wyoming Motel News* explained to their readers that the highway department would be buying up outdoor signs not in compliance with their regulations (Figure 123). The bill prohibited

Figure 123. A Wyoming Department of Transportation highway crew removes a billboard from U.S. Highway 26 near Riverton in 1972. Credit: Wyoming State Archives



¹⁶⁰ "Public Hearing on Beautification Act Will Be in Cheyenne May 3, 4, and 5" *Wyoming Motel News* V, no. 7 (March 1966): 1; "Attendance at Beautification Meeting Small" and "Norris Testifies" *Wyoming Motel News* V, no. 8 (May 1966): 1, 3-4.

¹⁶¹ Lady Bird Johnson's biographer Lewis L. Gould writes that the Highway Beautification Act was the "most controversial and enduring aspect of her career." He also notes that the act is "now described as an example of good intentions gone wrong because of weaknesses in the law and a lack of commitment to enforce it." See Lewis L. Gould, "First Lady as Catalyst: Lady Bird Johnson and Highway Beautification in the 1960s" *Environmental Review* 10, no. 2 (Summer, 1986): 78.

advertising visible from the interstate highways and U.S. Routes that was not directional in nature or promoting scenic or cultural attractions. Commercial billboards were still allowed in zoned industrial or commercial areas, or on the property of the business they were advertising. The act also regulated the dimensions that signs could take and prevented the clustering of signs in close proximity. No signs could be erected within five hundred feet of an interstate interchange, intersection, or rest area. All billboards were required to be permitted every three years.¹⁶²

Infrastructure, Wayfinding, and Highway Beautification: Rest Areas

The legacy of other aspects of the HBA is easier to understand. The widespread installation of rest areas along the nation's primary roadways is perhaps the most visible and successful provision of the act. Just like the desire to remove junkyards and billboards, the need for rest areas was recognized prior to the Johnson Administration. In 1958 the American Association of State Highway Officials explained the intention of rest areas.

Rest areas are to be provided on Interstate highways as a safety measure. Safety rest areas are off-road spaces with provisions for emergency stopping

and resting by motorists for short periods. They have freeway type entrances and exit connections, parking areas, benches and tables and may have toilets and water supply where proper maintenance and supervision are assured. They may be designed for short-time picnic use in addition to parking of vehicles for short periods. They are not to be planned for use as local parks.¹⁶³

Biennial reports from the Wyoming State Highway Commission in the late 1950s and early 1960s make mention of both "roadside parks," the forerunner to rest areas that offered in general fewer amenities, and rest areas. In 1958 the commission noted,

A number of roadside parks were completed by maintenance forces during the biennium and park areas previously established have been improved as time and funds permitted. These areas have been very favorably received by the traveling public and the parks have played a big role in helping to keep the litter problem on state highways under control. All these areas have picnic tables and trash barrels and a number now include rest room facilities and running water. Since the Federal Government has agreed to the use of federal funds for the

¹⁶² "Older Billboards are First to Go Under New State Law" *Wyoming Motel News* XI, no. 2 (March 1971): 1-2.

¹⁶³ *A Policy on Safety Rest Areas for the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of State Highway Officials, 1958), 7.

construction of the areas, several such parks were constructed during the last biennium as a part of the construction project.¹⁶⁴

Between 1958 and 1960 District 5 alone constructed ten new roadside parks, reporting “greater numbers of travelers, station wagons, and tents” in general and “as many as 30 cars at a time” at the rest area between Lander and Dubois. District 5 concluded, “There is no letup in the public demand for better and more extensive service.” By 1966 this district had constructed its sixteenth roadside park.¹⁶⁵

Rest areas were constructed as part of the Interstate Highway System. Modeled after the roadside parks that preceded them, rest areas provided comforts to travelers typically encompassing toilets, drinking water, picnic grounds and shelters, and information including maps and local attractions (Figures 124–125). Unlike the rest of the strictly-regulated interstate system, which held each state to the same construction and maintenance standards, rest area design was left to the discretion of individual states. Many states took the opportunity to express something about their heritage, from Virginia’s nod to Colonial Williamsburg to New Mexico’s incorporation of vigas, corbels, and latillas

¹⁶⁴ Wyoming State Highway Commission, *Twenty-First Biennial Report, 1956–1958* (Cheyenne, 1958), RG 0045, Wyoming State Library, 36–38.

¹⁶⁵ Wyoming State Highway Commission, *Twenty-Second Biennial Report, 1958–1960* (Cheyenne, 1960), RG 0045, Wyoming State Library, 53–54; Wyoming State Highway Commission, *Twenty-Fifth Biennial Report, 1964–1966* (Cheyenne, 1966), RG 0045, Wyoming State Library, 66. District 5 includes all or portions of Teton, Park, Hot Springs, Fremont, Big Horn, Washakie, and Natrona counties.



Top: Figure 124. Circa 1968 postcard of the Interstate 80 rest area near Pine Bluffs. This scene shows the rest area’s proximity to the interstate, its picnic areas, and its playground. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Bottom: Figure 125. The Pine Bluffs rest area lit at night, 1968. Credit: Wyoming State Archives



into otherwise simple sheds. What could have been extraordinarily minimal buildings took on the spirit of roadside architecture, celebrating regional characteristics in whimsical ways. To some extent, rest areas replaced the local character always in easy reach along the numbered highways.

Rest areas were designed with the safety of motorists in mind, intended to provide rest and refreshment to weary drivers who could become a danger to themselves and others; however, the states saw their potential to be utilized as cultural portals. Because motorists can only enter and exit the interstate system at points defined by the interchanges, the introduction of this highway system meant that many travelers might pass through a state without interacting with it in any meaningful way beyond its rest areas. During the interstate highway's early years the interchange system had not yet fully developed, meaning travelers had even fewer opportunities to exit the flow of high-speed traffic. The idea that travelers could be educated and perhaps even detoured at these courtesy areas prompted not only the use of heritage-inspired architectural forms, but also interior and exterior displays of information (Figure 126). Many rest areas provided maps and attractive photographs of landmarks in the general region, along with directions on how to reach them, in displays on the interior of toilet buildings. Rest areas also became prime locations for exterior historical markers advising tourists of battles,



Figure 126. A visitor to the Interstate 90 rest area in Sheridan views the interior historical and cultural displays, 1972. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

overland immigration, or early settlements that occurred in close proximity to the rest area.

Structures within a rest area typically consisted of a large toilet building and smaller structures that echoed the architectural theme established in the main building. Picnic shelters were a nearly universal feature of rest areas. Much

of the rest area was given over to paved circulation and parking and park-like arrangement of native landscaping that encouraged travelers to pause momentarily and engage with the scenery they had been passively regarding from behind the windshield. Site selection took several factors into consideration, among them the distance between rest areas, the availability of drinking water, the scenic qualities of an area, and the geological and historical features of an area. It was also crucial that the land could be obtained for this use.¹⁶⁶

Many rest areas continue to function in their historic capacity. Those that have been discontinued are usually completely removed from the interstate landscape. Continued use dictates frequent updates. As such, many rest areas have been refreshed or modernized and may no longer retain their historic characteristics. In Wyoming historic structures may still be observed at the Bitter Creek Rest Area between Rawlins and Rock Springs off Interstate 80 and at the Lusk Rest Area on U.S. Highway 20. The Lusk Rest Area was the first “roadside beautification area” in Wyoming that was completed as a result of the HBA (Figure 127).

In February 1966 *Wyoming Motel News* reported that J.T. Banner and Associates had been employed as architects overseeing the beautification project in Lusk, which was predicted to cost around \$150,000. The entire project was



intended to beautify all four entrances to Lusk, but the two entrances on U.S. Highway 20 were to receive the most attention. The major tools for this project were to be trees, shrubs, and grasses, and it was hoped that trees could be arranged to screen the Lusk town dump from view from U.S. Highway 85. The biggest part of the project involved construction of the rest area.¹⁶⁷

Located about a mile-and-a-half from the intersection of US 20 and US 85, the rest area encompassed the historic

Figure 127. The Lusk Rest Area was the first “roadside beautification area” in Wyoming completed as part of the Highway Beautification Act. The distinctive steel-arch picnic arbor roof supports seen in this 1973 photograph were used at several rest areas in the state and may still be seen at the Bitter Creek Rest Area between Rawlins and Rock Springs. Credit: Wyoming State Archives

¹⁶⁶ Joanna M. Dowling, “A Brief History of Rest Stops,” in *The Last Stop: Vanishing Rest Stops of the American Roadside* (Brooklyn, NY: powerHouse Books, 2016), 12–19.

¹⁶⁷ “Lusk Site of First Highway Beautification,” *Wyoming Motel News* 5 (February 1966): 6.



Figure 128. The steel-arch roof supports were retained to create a landscape feature after the Lusk Rest Area was redesigned in 2000. Credit: Richard L. Collier

George Lathrop Monument, said to cover the grave of the nineteenth-century stagecoach driver. Newly-added features included picnic tables with shelter arbors, fire grills, and playground equipment in addition to the toilet building. This rest area offered the first flush toilets, heated restrooms, sewer system, and hot and cold water at any roadside park in Wyoming. When the rest area was redesigned and converted to passive solar energy in

2000, the original steel-arch picnic arbor roof supports were retained to create a landscape feature (Figure 128). Archival evidence reveals that these steel roof supports were also used at the Dwyer Junction Rest Area, the Glendo Rest Area, and the Fort Steele Rest Area. As of this writing, they may still be seen at the Bitter Creek Rest Area between Rawlins and Rock Springs.

Storefronts and Signs

In his seminal work *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, Chester Liebs describes the “thousands of commercial structures designed to capture the attention of an audience passing by at high speed” as “architecture for speed-reading.” As we have seen, the automobile transformed nearly every aspect of newly-constructed commercial buildings after about 1920, often creating new building forms that responded to the dramatic change in transportation technology. In addition to the footprint of commercial spaces, advances in transportation had an important effect on retail advertising in the form of signs and storefronts.

In the mid-nineteenth century the typical downtown commercial block consisted of one-, two-, or three-story buildings built flush with one another at their façades and side walls. Most of these façades consisted of large ornamental cornices topping several stories of flat wall above a street-level storefront. Retailers were housed behind a façade that held few clues as to their commercial purpose. In the 1910s and 1920s many auto-

related retailers who remained within historic commercial districts followed this pattern. The typical commercial block essentially presented a blank palate on which the prevailing architectural style of the day could be transposed. Additionally, the commercial block suggested a kind of civilized stability in growing urban areas in a young and expanding nation. The traditional commercial block, however, did not respond to merchants' advertising needs.

By the 1840s and 1850s shop proprietors had solved this problem by adding signs to windows, exposed walls, façades, and roofs illustrating their commercial purpose and providing ad space for assorted products. The blank palate for style had become a canvas for commercial messages. The need for large, bold advertising was exacerbated by the invention of trolleys and streetcars, which by the end of the nineteenth century had been installed in many cities, conveying passengers who had only a few seconds to absorb the messages commercial buildings were trying to impart. The earliest billboards appeared at this time, sometimes lit at night by incandescent bulbs.

The automobile did not create "architecture for speed-reading," but it did accelerate the trend toward visually aggressive building forms and signs. In developing auto-oriented retail in commercial strips, property owners had much greater leeway toward designing buildings and signs that could be seen at a distance by rapidly approaching

motorists and that would set their property apart from other similar commercial offerings within the same strip.¹⁶⁸ Motor courts and motels that resembled small adobe missions or log cabins, gas stations built like storybook cottages, and sleek, streamlined cafés were all methods Wyoming merchants employed to appeal to tourists, especially in an era before lodging reservations were commonplace. As we have seen, there were a few instances of programmatic architecture—the Indian Village Motor Lodge in Cheyenne and the Warwhoop souvenir stand near Pine Bluffs—but this type of visual gimmickry seems to have been less pronounced in Wyoming compared to other tourist destinations. Equally important to attracting customers was signage.

Michael J. Auer has equated signs with the signature of a property and its owner, reflecting taste and personality. Auer argues,

By giving concrete details about daily life in a former era, historic signs allow the past to speak to the present in ways that buildings by themselves do not. . . . Historic signs give continuity to public spaces, becoming part of the community memory. They sometimes become landmarks in themselves, almost without regard for the building to which they are attached, or the property on which they stand. Furthermore, in an age of uniform franchise

¹⁶⁸ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 39–44.



Figure 129. Neon illuminates a dark night in Casper, circa 1950.

Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

signs and generic plastic “box” signs, historic signs often attract by their individuality: by a clever detail, a daring use of color and motion, or a reference to particular people, shops, or events.¹⁶⁹

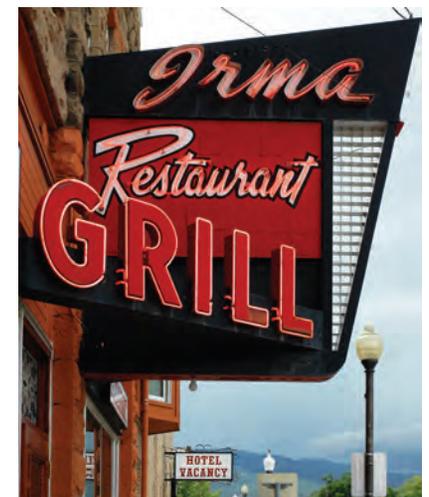
In this spirit, roadside survey work included all historic advertising and signage, even if the commercial enterprise was not explicitly tied to automobile tourism. Many of the signs discovered during the survey used neon to

convey their messages. Neon first appeared in signs during the 1920s, reaching its height of popularity during the 1940s. For a few decades thereafter it fell from favor, then enjoyed a resurgence in the 1970s. Neon is a gas which glows when an electric charge passes through it. It can be encased in glass tubes, offering sign makers the ability to mold light into shapes, colors, and images only limited by their imaginations. In the hands of artists, neon became a conscious art form. Because of the malleability of glass tubes, neon signs were easily adapted to changing stylistic movements like the Art Deco and the Streamline Moderne, and during the late 1950s, starbursts and rings signaling the nation’s fascination with outer space.

In other places signs and buildings have been integrated into storefronts incorporating pigmented structural glass (“Carrara glass” or “Vitrolite”) and porcelain enamel panels fastened to a steel structure. These materials allowed words, images, colors, and patterns to become part of the storefront and were popular between the 1920s and 1940s. In the decades after World War II plastic materials also joined traditional materials like wood and steel in the sign maker’s shop. Plastic can be formed into almost any shape and can be tinted to most colors. It is translucent and can be lit from behind to create a glow. It is also durable and inexpensive.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Michael J. Auer, “The Preservation of Historic Signs,” *Preservation Briefs* 25 (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, Preservation Assistance, 1991), 1.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4–6.



Clockwise:

Million Dollar Cowboy Bar, Jackson. Credit: Richard L. Collier, 2014

Top Hat Motel, Jeffrey City. Credit: RLC, 2012

Green Gander Bar, Green River. Credit: Elizabeth C. King, 2013

Bowling alley, Edgerton. Credit: ECK, 2014

Irma Restaurant and Grill, Cody. Credit: RLC, 2014

Clockwise:

Firebird Motor Hotel,
Cheyenne. Credit:
Richard L. Collier, 2014

Shoshoni Motel,
Shoshoni. Credit:
Elizabeth C. King, 2014

Rustic Pine Tavern,
Dubois. Credit:
RLC, 2014

Longhorn Lodge,
Rock River. Credit:
Erin N. Dorbin, 2013



Conclusion

In 1935 the Lincoln Highway Association published an official history of its role in the vast physical and social changes wrought by the mass popularization of the automobile. The association likened the Lincoln Highway, America's first transcontinental road, to "a vast river, flowing westward in a single great and increasing stream" dividing in Wyoming and Utah to access various national parks or the West Coast cities of Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

That stream was a river of gold to the country through which it passes—tourist gold—for the hotelkeeper, the garage operator, the sellers of gasoline and oil and food. Cities and towns contended for this wealth, seeking by all fair and unfair means to divert the whole stream, or at least a larger portion of it, into that channel where it would profit them the most.¹⁷¹

In more recent years historians John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle have proposed that "nothing else has made as great an effect on built environment in the United States as automobility."¹⁷² The invention and adoption of the car and the creation of auto roads to convey it have affected all aspects of modern life. In vast, rural, sparsely-populated Wyoming, the automobile and its infrastructure unlocked the state's natural wonders and unique culture, historically and in the present day feeding one of the state's most important industries, tourism. As the importance of so-called heritage tourism becomes increasingly clear, there is greater recognition of a subset of travelers seeking unique experiences with local history and culture. This can be of benefit to mom-and-pop motels and cafés and other small tourism-oriented businesses in communities of all sizes around the state. This survey report intends to encourage appreciation of the mid-twentieth-century commercial landscapes of Wyoming and inspire the preservation of roadside architecture and landscapes for decades to come.

¹⁷¹ Lincoln Highway Association, *The Lincoln Highway: the Story of a Crusade that Made Transportation History* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935), 155.

¹⁷² John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Remembering Roadside America: Preserving the Recent Past as Landscape and Place* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), xv.



Little America, Cheyenne. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

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Romeo & Juliet’s Cafe, Powder River. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

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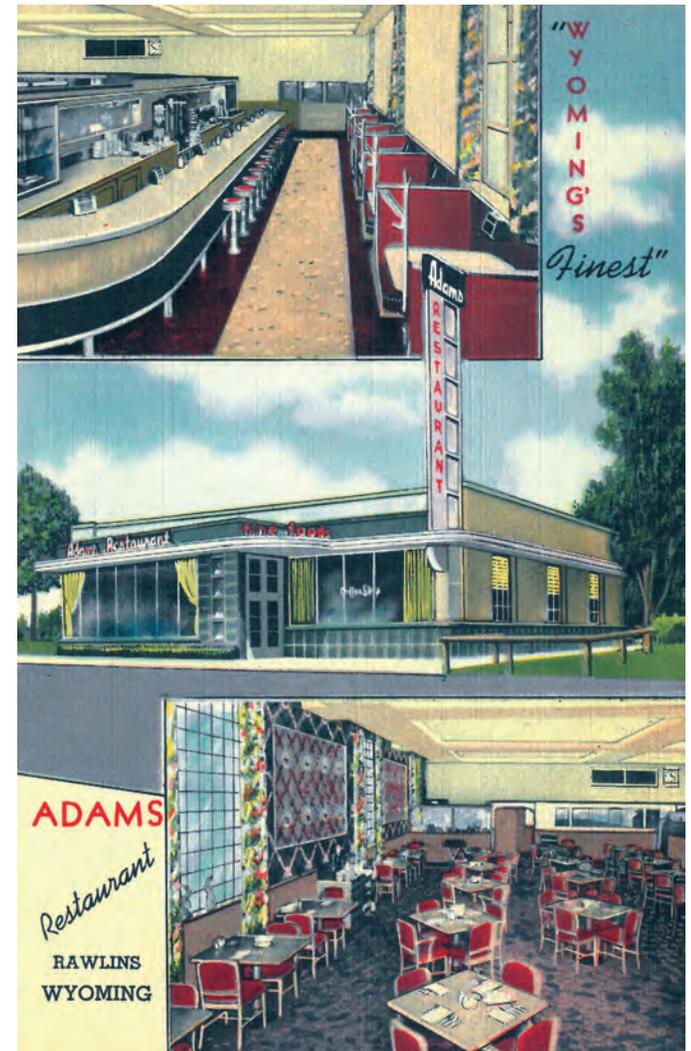
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Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming



Tomahawk Motel, Riverton. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

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Ernst's Saddlery, Sheridan. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

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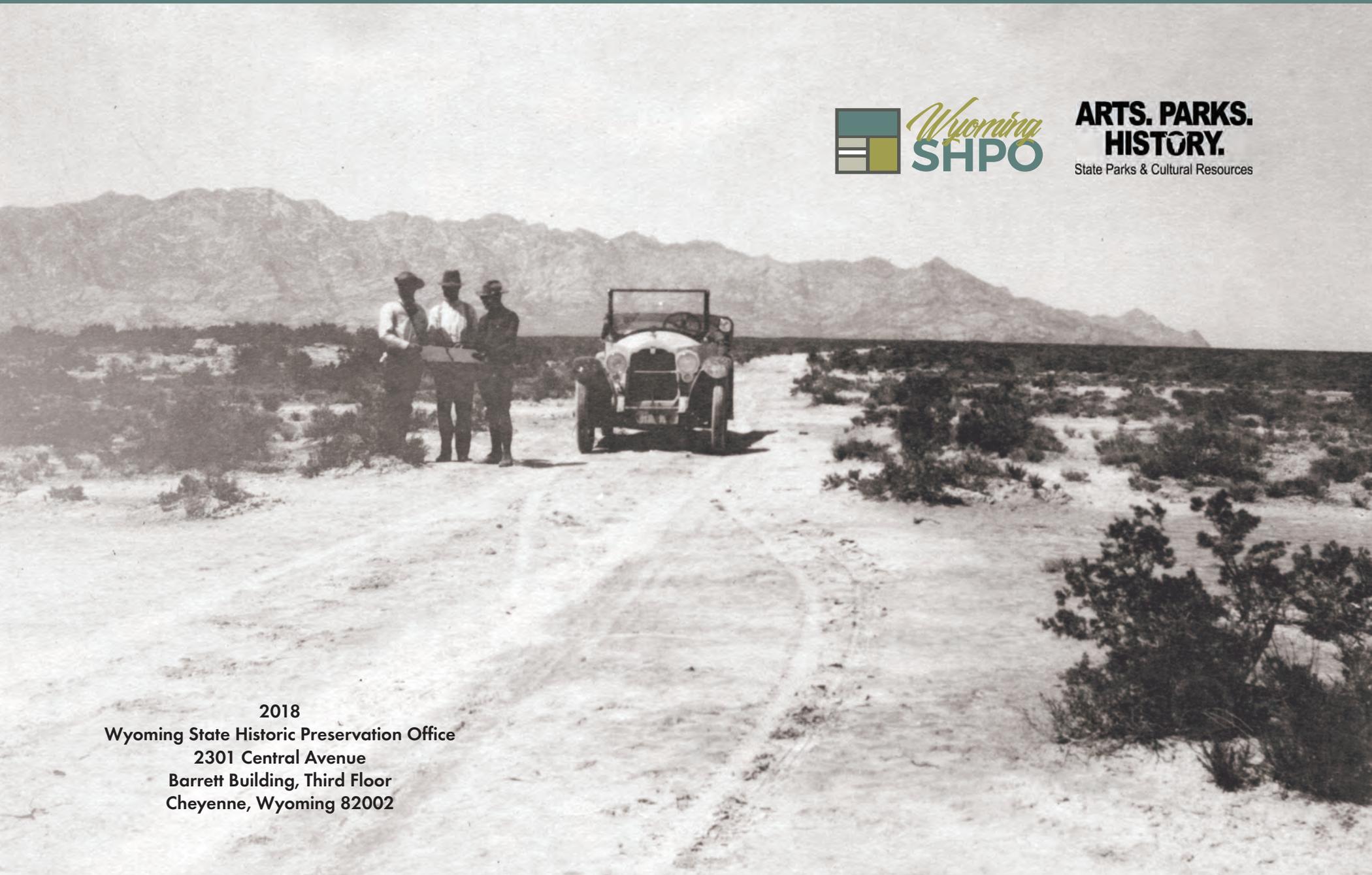


Bennett's Auto Court, Evanston. Credit: James L. Ehernberger Western Railroad Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

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