Clues Sheet

Route 66 ran from Chicago to Los Angeles, creating connections between hundreds of small towns. The chief supporter of the highway, Cyrus Avery, coined the route’s nickname—Main Street of America. The road was completed in the 1930s and used as a trucking route through the Southwest. Hundreds of thousands of families piled their possessions into their cars and took this road to migrate west to California during and after the Great Depression.

A great percentage of the migrating families came from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Missouri, but they moved for different reasons. Some left due to the drought that caused the Dust Bowl. Others left as a result of the federal New Deal policy that encouraged families to stop growing crops in order to boost market prices. But the majority of travelers were city dwellers seeking a better life in California.

Tourists also traveled this route, for adventure and to experience the freedom of travel. By the 1940s, family-owned hotels, gasoline stations, and stores designed for the convenience of tourists were well-established.

3-1 Haggard family photo, 1935 (Courtesy of Lillian Haggard Hoge)
The Haggard family left the farm they leased in Oklahoma because of poor health and a fire that destroyed their barn in 1935. They bought a 1926 Chevrolet sedan, hooked up a trailer, loaded some of their precious belongings—including a camera—and headed to California. They took this picture of their journey along Route 66. When they arrived, they lived in a remodeled railroad refrigerator car. Merle Haggard, the famous country singer, was born after the family moved to California.

3-2 1926 Ford Model T roadster (NMAH Transportation Collections)
Between 1908 and 1927, the Ford Motor Company produced over half of all automobiles sold. The Model T’s relatively low price enticed more than 15 million Americans to buy one. The mass-produced Model T helped make it possible for more and more Americans to get behind the wheel. It was sturdy, easy to fix, and could navigate unpaved roads. This made it especially popular with farmers.

3-3 Hitchhikers, 1938 (Copyright of the Dorothea Lange Collection, Oakland Museum of California; gift of Paul S. Taylor)
In the summer of 1938 this family hitchhiked on Route 66 from Missouri to Arizona, where a sawmill job was available. Here they are in Weatherford, Oklahoma. In the 1930s, hundreds of thousands of people moved west. Not all were poor farmers escaping drought and foreclosure. Most came from cities and small towns.
3-4 Hamons’s gas station, 1940s (Courtesy of Cheryl Hamons Nowka)
The Hamons family owned a gas station along Route 66, in Provine, Oklahoma. They started the business in 1941. Lucille and her family lived above the station. Behind the station were tourist cabins where travelers could spend the night. Lucille was called the mother of the “Mother Road.”

3-5 Ethel May Krockenberger, 1947 (Courtesy of Tracy Fitzwater, Teri Fink, and the Estate of Ethel M. Bellisine)
In 1947, Ethel May Krockenberger drove with three friends from Rochester, New York, to Los Angeles, California. A road trip on and off of Route 66 was an adventurous journey for the friends to take together and discover the natural beauty of the West. “Our rest stops were lots of fun … we became aware of a car with four young men doing the same as we.”

3-6 Navajo Trading Post, New Mexico, 1941 (Photograph by Ferenz Fedor, courtesy of Museum of New Mexico; neg. no. 102015)
Building on the railroads’ promotion of the Southwest as a tourist destination, roadside tourist attractions such as Indian trading posts lined parts of the road. Route 66 inspired an architecture of roadside conveniences. The Phillips Petroleum Company named its gasoline Phillips 66, after the popular road. Can you find the gasoline sign?

“Route 66”
If you ever plan to motor west
Travel my way, take the highway, that’s the best.
Get your kicks on Route 66!

It winds from Chicago to L.A.,
More than 2,000 miles all the way.
Get your kicks on Route 66!
© 2002 Troup–London Music

Like many people seeking adventure and new jobs, Bobby and Cynthia Troup left Pennsylvania in 1946 and journeyed to California to find a job in the music industry. Driving along Route 66, they wrote a song about the historic highway. When they arrived in Los Angeles, Nat King Cole recorded the song and made it a hit.