



iterature on Route 66

Route 66 books are basically of two kinds: those using the highway as a metaphor for the journey through life, and those written primarily about the road itself. Here are a few highlights. Check with your bookseller or local public library for more. And where you discover new material that could be of interest to others, be sure to e-mail us a complete reference. Publishers are invited to submit review copies as well.

Route 66 as a Journey

In 1939 John Steinbeck surprised American readers with *The Grapes of Wrath* [Viking], his poignant new novel. The author had little confidence in his book at the time, yet the work has been translated into every known language, receiving worldwide acclaim.

A much newer book, Dan Morgan's *Rising in the West* [Alfred A. Knopf, 1992] is a remarkable piece of nonfiction. In a very real sense, this work picks up right where Steinbeck's book leaves off. If you ever found yourself wondering where the Joad family might have gone next, or how their kids might have turned out, this book comes close to answering those questions. Because the book did not receive the wide distribution it deserved, a review of Morgan's work follows on the next page.

Route 66 as an American Icon

The first work to recognize Route 66 as a destination in itself, rather than merely a road to somewhere else, was Jack D. Rittenhouse. He self-published a small classic in 1946, entitled *A Guide Book to Highway 66*. His book was described as a complete handbook on getting the most fun—and the least aggravation—from a journey that was, at the close of World War II, still a formidable journey. A facsimile version of the original book is published today by University of New Mexico Press.

Several books followed in the wake of efforts to revitalize old Route 66 after it had been largely replaced by the Interstate and finally decertified as a U.S. highway in 1985. *Route 66* [University of Oklahoma Press, 1988], by Quinta Scott and Susan Kelly, was the first to remind us of the highway's legendary status.

Michael Wallis followed with *Route 66: The Mother Road* [St. Martin's Press, 1990], an earthy combination of interviews and historical narrative, supported by colorful graphics, postcards and photographs. *Route 66 Remembered* [Motorbooks International, 1996] is a later offering by Michael Karl Witzel, with a well-written text and striking photographs.

A recent addition is *Return to Route 66* [Council Oaks, 1998] a snappy postcard book by Shellee Graham, offering students an excellent source of marvelous roadside graphics. In fact, Graham's work highlights a common flaw shared by most road books—they concentrate on roadsiders' memories of the highway, when in fact, Route 66 was built upon travelers' experiences of the highway and its attractions. Few works do much to view the highway through travelers' eyes, even though that is how millions remember it.

Other Excellent Resources

There are a host of other Route 66 works, including:

Searching for 66, self-published by Tom Teague, an introspective look at the highway in a new second edition, with a color insert; *Greetings from Gallup: Six Decades on Route 66* by Sally Noe, a photo-essay available from the Gallup Convention & Visitors' Bureau; *Route 66 Across New Mexico: A Wanderer's Guide*, by Jill Schneider [University of New Mexico, 1991] and *Murder on Route 66*, a fictional work by William Sanders [St. Martin's Press, 1994]. All are worth a look.

Guide Book to Historic Route 66 in California Third Edition. Maps, photos, mileage and historic information. 48 pages, Paperback. California Historic Route 66 Association, 2117 Foothill Boulevard #66, La Verne CA 91750.

Missouri US 66 Tour Book Postcards, photographs, and driving instructions carefully assembled by author Skip Curtis. Great background material on the "Show Me" state.

Route 66: America's First Main Street Spencer Crump's take on the social conditions related to the highway. Good 176-page resource for photos, maps, and illustrations. Hardbound and paperback.

The Route 66 Cookbook and *The Main Street of America Cookbook* feature Marian Clark's collection recipes from hometown diners, hotel dining rooms, and cafes. Paperback. Interesting background material for any roadside study.

Traveling the New Historic Route 66 of Illinois covers the Illinois sections of Route 66. Maps, photographs and highway attractions. Well-detailed. Paperback

Special Mention

Oliver E. Rooker's, *Riding the Travel Bureau: Ghost Riders Network on Route 66 During the Great Depression* [Memoir Publishing, 1994] is worth a special note. Not only is the book about Route 66 and the Depression, it is a first-hand account of how life must be lived when our institutions and government turn fearful, protective and vicious. The "travel bureau" was an informal network of drivers who carried passengers for hire between Oklahoma and Los Angeles, by running the Bum Blockade illegally set up by the Los Angeles Police Department. Riding the bureau could be very dangerous, but thousands of dust-bowl immigrants without transport of their own managed to get around the country that way. Rooker's book is available from Memoir Publishing, PO Box 38, Canton, OK 73724. Cost is \$8.95.

Although not strictly about Route 66, Frank Rowsome, Jr's fine little book, *The Verse by the Side of the Road* [Dutton Paperback, 1966] reveals much of the charm and mystery about all those Burma-Shave signs found along the highway during the heyday of American two-lane travel. For example: IF YOU / DON'T KNOW / WHOSE SIGNS / THESE ARE / YOU CAN'T HAVE / DRIVEN VERY FAR. BURMA SHAVE. Special Note: Old-time Route 66 travelers often quote the great verses they remember from the roadside in New Mexico and Arizona. Yet these were two of the three states in which the company's signs were never posted. Ah, the powers of human memory...
