Along Route 66

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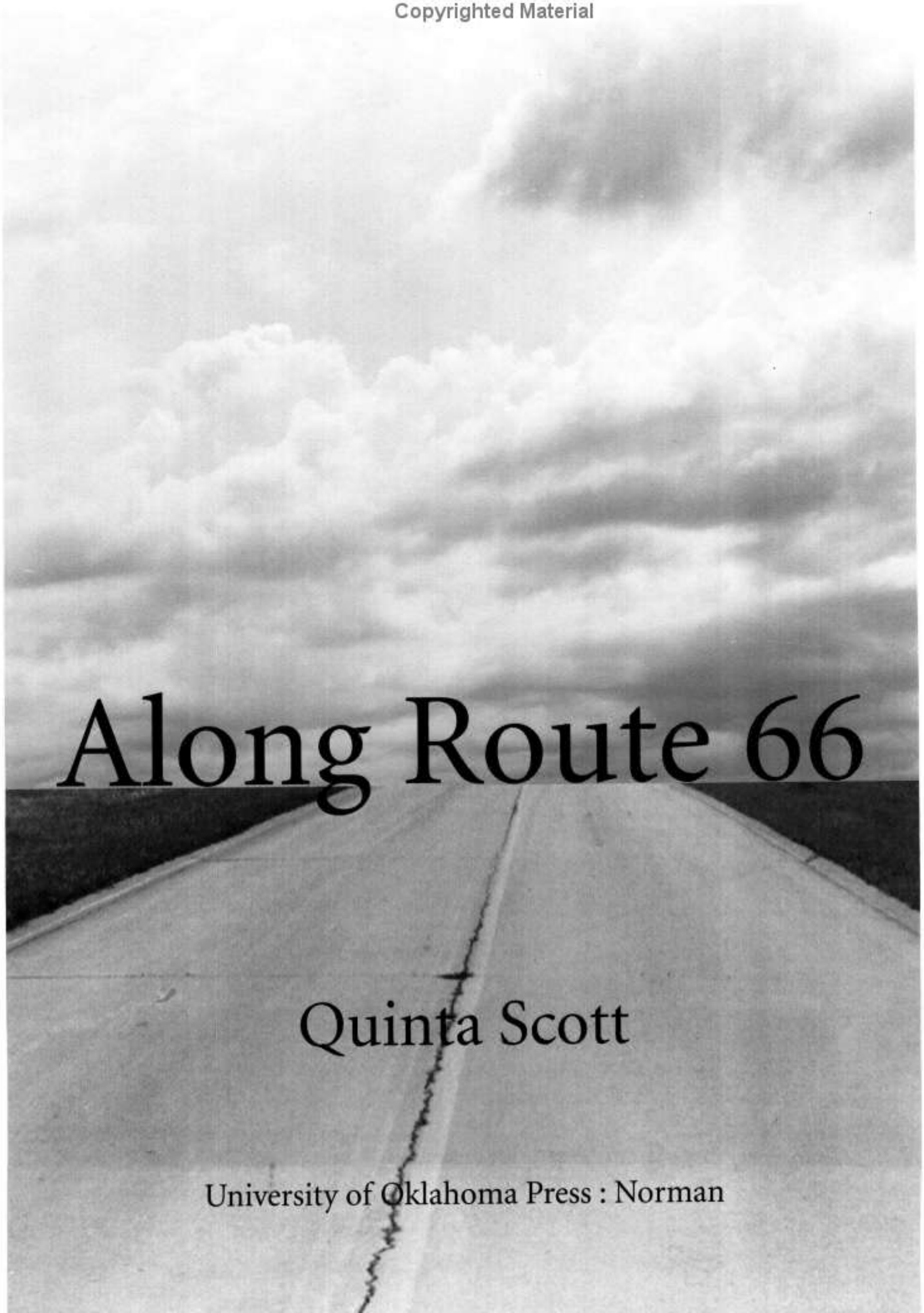

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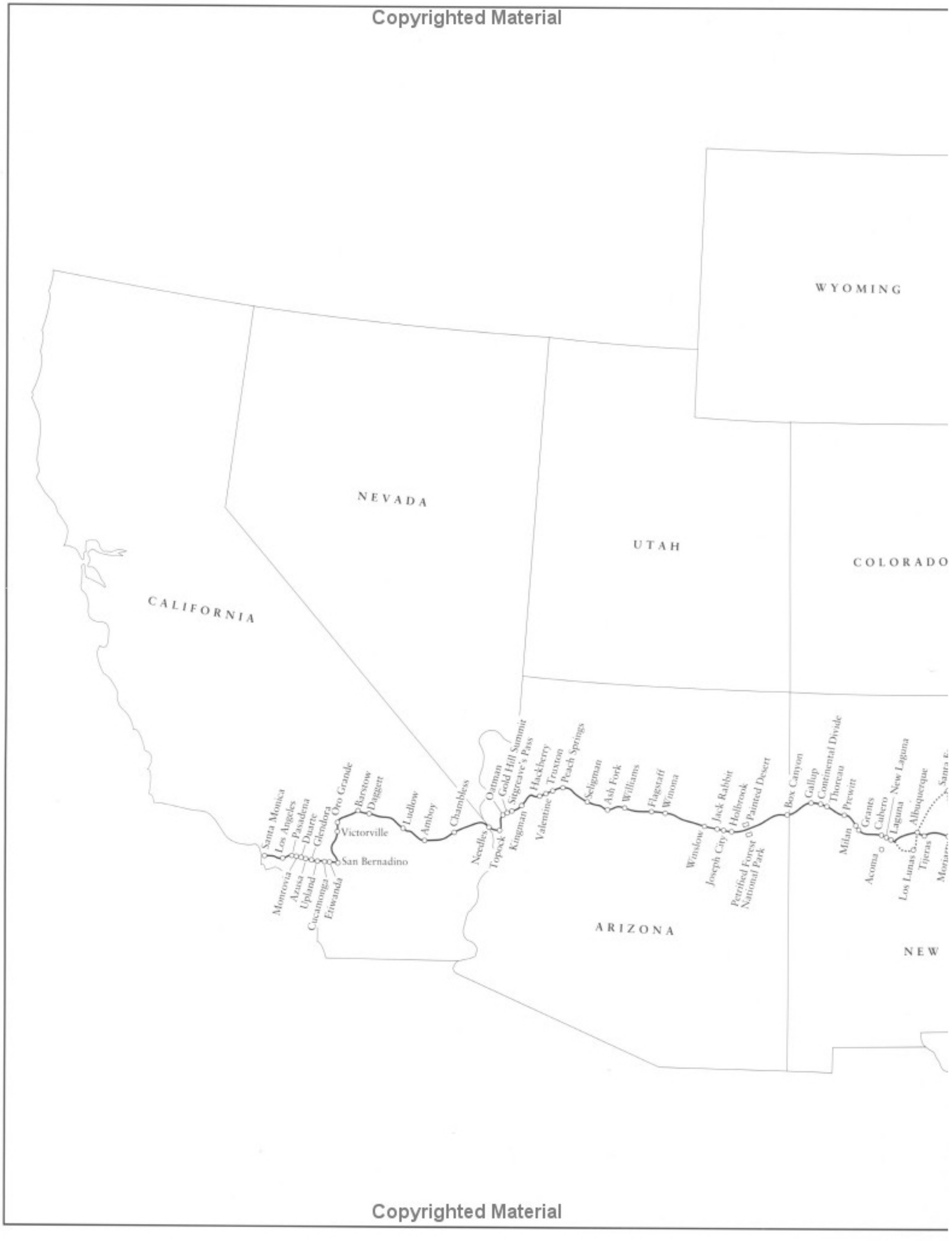
In memory of my parents,
Tirzah Perfect Dunn
Frederick Wallace Dunn



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Acknowledgments

Many, many people helped move this project along. Dozens of folks patiently told me their stories and their histories along Route 66. When Susan Croce Kelly and I did the oral research for *Route 66: The Highway and Its People*, we literally knocked on the doors of old gas stations, motels, and cafés and asked, "Who built this building?" When we located that person, we tape-recorded our interview. Then we played the old college game: Who do you know? One by one, our informants passed us down the road, and we learned how they invented American auto tourism. When I wrote the first draft of this book, I drew much of my information, particularly architectural information, from these tapes.

On the final draft, I developed a new strategy for locating informants: Yahoo!'s People Search. If I had a name, I learned I could log onto the Internet, call up Yahoo!, type in a name and a town, and get a phone number. Seventy-five percent of the time the person I needed to talk to answered the phone. Occasionally I needed the help of local reference librarians who were always willing to comb city directories for a name or, failing that, to give me the name and number of the local historian, who was invariably willing to help. Kate Anthony of the Amarillo Public Library, John Vittal at the Albuquerque Public Library, and many anonymous librarians in towns along the road were always ready to help. City planners and engineers in the building departments of Upland, Glendora, Duarte, and Barstow, California, helped me flush out owners and construction dates of buildings in their towns.

Details, details, details. Numerous patient friends along the road filled in details. Terry Sykes in the interlibrary loan department of the St. Louis Public Library was tireless in tracking down material for me. Maggie McShan, who researches history for the love of it for the Needles (California) Historical Society, provided names and information on businesses in Needles and the Mojave Desert. John R. Hill, director of the Oklahoma Route 66 Museum in Clinton, always gave encouragement and direction. Once again, Ruth Sigler Avery filled in with information about her father-in-law, Cyrus Stevens Avery. Marian Clark, who wrote the wonderful *Route 66 Cookbook*, helped me date the demise of the Old English Inn in Tulsa. Joe Winkler, who presides over the Map Room at the St. Louis Public Library, and Ann Little, who came to Bridgeport, Oklahoma, as a bride, helped me nail down exactly where Bridgeport used to be. Joe Smith, who grew up in Santa Rosa, New Mexico, accepted my phone calls whenever I had a question about his part of the world, as did Glenn Johnson in Kingman, Arizona, and Pauline Bauer in Albuquerque. Paul Milan in Grants, New Mexico, told me the story of his family's motel and then helped me find other business owners in Grants. Bud Gunderson confirmed that the little gas station in Thoreau had belonged to his father in Grants. Bill Tomlinson of the Mojave River Museum in Barstow, California, dug

out the information on the Ludlow Mercantile and then passed me along to Beryl Bell at the Daggett (California) Historical Society.

Esley Hamilton, the preservation historian with St. Louis County, read the very first chapter, supplied information on the Coral Court in St. Louis, and pointed me in the direction of the research that has been done on Missouri Ozark sandstone construction. He then researched the title history of the Park Plaza Courts in St. Louis and came up with the name of the original owners. This enabled me to track down Mickey Stroud in Waco, Texas, who told me the history of the Park Plaza Courts chain. Keith A. Sculle, Illinois Historical Preservation Agency, and Heath Henry, Tulsa County (Oklahoma) Historical Society, also helped with the work on the Park Plaza Courts. Finally, the Texas Collection, Baylor University, supplied me with a reproduction of the postcard of the Alamo Plaza in Waco, Texas, thus enabling me to complete the visual links between the Alamo Plaza facade and its numerous imitators along 66, including the Park Plaza Courts.

Charles Lee Cook, manager of the Shady Rest Motel in Tulsa, measured one of his cabins for me to see if it conformed to the plans and specifications of a cabin published in *Popular Mechanics* in July 1935. Close enough.

Robert Rubright read the first draft of the first chapter and encouraged me to go on. Jeffery Smith read both the first and the final drafts, made many good suggestions, and wrote letters of support. Marti Lattimore and Jim Hamilton took the first draft along on their honeymoon and brought back a report on the condition of the buildings illustrated. Then they wrote a letter of support. John A. Jakle and Alan Gowans read the first draft and encouraged me to complete the work.

John N. Drayton, director and editor-in-chief of the University of Oklahoma Press, read the first chapter and encouraged me to finish. He then ushered me through the review process, at one point asking me to defend the project, a process that was most helpful. Randy Lewis, Jean Hurtado, Ursula Daly, and Jo Ann Reece of the Press patiently answered my questions as I completed the manuscript. Finally, Ursula Smith showed me the value of a good manuscript editor as she shepherded me through the editing process with great good humor and many pats on the back.

The Design Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts awarded me a fellowship in 1981 that funded the photography for the first book—*Route 66: The Highway and Its People*—and this book. The Josephine Perfect and Charles Ulrick Bay Foundation matched the fellowship. I would like to thank Robert Ashton, director of the foundation, and Frederick Bay and Synova Bay Hayes, board members, for their continuing support.

Bess and Al Long provided me with my Oklahoma home in Geary and, like the loving friends they are, indulged me in onion-fried burgers in El Reno.

Finally, my husband, Barrie H. Scott, an architect, took a week off and went over the manuscript with me line by line, correcting the architectural details, helping me understand the lingo and how a building goes together, and then helped me put it all in plain English. He gave me love and support and his father's 1941 *Architectural Graphic Standards*, where I learned about adobe and other building materials of the period.

QUINTA SCOTT

St. Louis

Along Route 66

The Architecture of America's Highway

It was the way out. Invented on the cusp of the depression, Route 66 was the road out of the mines, off the farm, away from troubled Main Street. It was the road to opportunity. And, after Americans had overcome the depression and won the war and good times boomed, Route 66 was the ultimate road trip. None of the great continental highways established in 1926—U.S. 20, U.S. 30, U.S. 40, U.S. 50, or U.S. 60—ever captured our collective imagination the way this highway did. U.S. 66 and the Lincoln Highway, U.S. 30, are the only national highways that have attracted historical associations dedicated to documenting their routes and erecting signs that mark them. U.S. Highway 66 started in Chicago and went south through the Illinois prairie; it turned west at St. Louis and went through the ancient Ozark hills into the Great Plains; it continued through some of the most romantic parts of the Southwest into California's Mojave Desert; it ended in Los Angeles at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.

U.S. Highway 66 died with the passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act in 1956, which established and funded the interstate highway system. It had been created in 1926 by a joint board of the American Association of State Highway Officials, which designated and numbered the roads that would be included in the federal highway system. In those thirty years, 1926 to 1956, legendary events along the highway turned U.S. Highway 66 into Route 66. It began with the Bunion Derby in 1928, a cross-country footrace that started in Los Angeles, headed east along U.S. 66 to Chicago, and ended in New York. The footrace was promoted by C. C. Pyle and the U.S. Highway 66 Association and was followed daily in newspapers across the country. It fixed Route 66 in the national consciousness. The race was won by Andy Payne, a Cherokee from Will Rogers's hometown, Claremore, a stop on U.S. 66 in Oklahoma.

In 1934 and continuing through 1935 and 1936, when the great winds blew away the topsoil from the drought-stricken plains of Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, migrants poured down 66 in their cars and trucks, looking for a better life in California. Dorothea Lange photographed them, Woody Guthrie wrote songs about them, John Steinbeck wrote a novel about them, and John Ford followed with the movie.[1] In 1946, ex-marine Bobby Troup packed up his wife, Cynthia, left the family music business in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and traveled down U.S. 66 to Los Angeles to try his hand at song writing. On the way he lifted the names of towns from his road map and strung them together into one of the most enduring songs of the postwar period.[2] In the early 1960s, as the dual-lane, interstate highways replaced the twisting, narrow ribbon of concrete that was U S. 66, Sterling Silliphant sealed the myth of Route 66 in our imaginations with his weekly television series about two guys traveling from adventure to adventure in a red Corvette.[3]

It is too easy to say that the heyday of the old road was a simpler, better time and that that is why we are so intrigued by Route 66. There was nothing simple about living through the depression and the dust bowl, or World War II, or the threat of nuclear annihilation that was the cold war. While the myth of Route 66 may be the story of the Bunion Derby, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and "Get Your Kicks," the reality of Route 66 was about making a living, about using architecture—buildings and signs—to make people "Stop: Fill it up, have a bite, stay the night."

In 1972 architect Robert Venturi alerted architects and historians to the character of American roadside buildings and their signs in *Learning from Las Vegas*, his study of the architecture of Las Vegas, Nevada. Venturi described what he saw as "the rule of Route 66"—the enormous neon sign beckoning the traveler off the road to a modest motel, gas station, or café.[4] In the last three decades, the many authors who have published books on the architecture of the American roadside have concentrated on bizarre examples: tamale stands in the shape of a tamale or chili parlors in the shape of a chili bowl, what Venturi called the "Duck" in American roadside architecture—so named after a Long Island store in the shape of a duck—where the building is the sign.[5] Or they have looked at individual building types—gas stations, motels, diners, and drive-ins. No one has taken the length of a single highway and looked at its architecture, at how that architecture developed, and at the regional influences on it.

If they did, what they would find is that the roadside buildings are not as bizarre or exciting as the architectural histories would have you believe. The building designers along U.S. 66 and other American highways reached back to the vernacular styles of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century rural and suburban houses. The folks who built their motels and gas stations on 66 drew on what they knew: the architecture of the Ozarks built of local sandstone; the architecture of the Great Plains—the Western Bungalow that appeared in Kansas in the 1870s and was carried south to Oklahoma Territory twenty years later; and the architecture of the Southwest, variations on the Spanish Colonial styles—the Spanish Mission, the Spanish Pueblo, and the Casa—that had been the way of building in New Mexico, Arizona, and California since the eighteenth century and before.[6] Occasionally motel owners in California drew on the work of the Greene brothers, who developed the Craftsman Bungalow in Pasadena at the turn of the century, a style that spread across the country in the teens and twenties.[7]

The builders on 66 were local miners, farmers, and townspeople who flocked to the roadside during the depression when it offered opportunities that could not be found in the mines, on the farm, or in town. There was a living to be made from families like the Joads of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* who were escaping the Great Plains in search of a better life in the West. Many of those who trekked west during the dust bowl days never made it to California but settled on the roadside and built successful businesses. However they got there, they made a good life along 66, where their architecture reflected local traditions and the difficulties of the times, where they built quickly using simple structural systems and materials available at the local supply store—wood frame, masonry, or structural clay tile before World War II, concrete block after the war. Whatever they chose, they finished their buildings in stucco or wood siding.

U.S. 66 was successful because of the efforts of one person. As a member of the Joint

Board of the American Association of State Highway Officials that laid out the United States system of highways in 1926, Cyrus Avery of Tulsa, Oklahoma, persuaded his colleagues on the board to route a road that connected Chicago to Los Angeles through his hometown. In doing so, the board ignored historical routes, most notably the Santa Fe Trail through Kansas to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and instead directed travelers across semipopulated stretches of the Missouri Ozarks and the Great Plains—Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle, and eastern New Mexico. Once he had the road laid out, Avery called it "the Main Street of America" and established the U.S. Highway 66 Association to promote it as the best route to California.[8]

It was. While New Mexico and Arizona may have been empty in 1926, the region west of Denver in central Utah and Nevada is *still* empty. Anyone who has driven west along northern routes to California—U.S. 30, U.S. 40, or U.S. 50—understands the success of 66. Even today, I-70, the interstate highway that replaced U.S. 40 and U.S. 50, comes to a lonely halt at its intersection with I-15 in the middle of a Utah desert. In the teens and the twenties, the road west in winter had you making your way across narrow, often snow-blocked passes in the Colorado Rockies—Berthoud Pass just west of Denver or Monarch Pass in central Colorado—to get to Utah and Nevada. From there the drive to California was across sixty miles of desert and up over a mountain, and sixty miles of desert and up over a mountain. That went on for two states until the traveler reached the Sierra Nevada on the Nevada-California border. It was not and is not an easy drive.

As blistering as the summer was in California's Mojave Desert, as dense as the ice fog could be at Clines Corners, New Mexico, as fierce as the hailstorms were in the Texas Panhandle, as dangerous as the sleet could be in Oklahoma and Missouri, 66 was the best route to California. And, although snow occasionally blocked 66 at Flagstaff, Arizona, the road that began in the Windy City ended, after all, in Tinsel Town, where there were two mild seasons—day and night. No wonder 66 was a success; no wonder it provided a way out for the millions who traveled west and for the thousands who stayed and made their living off the passing millions.

Almost every building constructed on Route 66 between 1926 and 1956 lost its economic viability the day President Dwight David Eisenhower signed the 1956 highway act. The long, double ribbons of limited-access highways that replaced 66 bypassed every little town between Chicago and Los Angeles, leaving the small Mom-and-Pop businesses—the motels, the cafés, and the gas stations on old 66—without direct access to their customers. This did not happen right away; it took thirty years to complete the interstate highway system. It happened little bit by little bit. Those enterprises that would not or could not adapt to the new way of doing business demanded by the layout of the interchanges on the new highways suffered a loss of clientele within hours of the opening of the bypass around their towns.

Almost every building lost its aesthetic respectability the day President Lyndon Baines Johnson, encouraged by his wife, Lady Bird, signed the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, which outlawed billboards on the new interstates. Lady Bird was responding to the cry put forth by Peter Blake from his respected position as editor of the *Architectural Forum*, a leading professional journal of the sixties, when he attacked the aesthetics of roadside businesses, their buildings, their signs, and their billboards in his book *God's Own Junkyard*,

published in 1964. Without the billboards, Mom and Pop had no way of notifying travelers on the interstate that they had a cozy cabin waiting for them in the next town. Business fell off; buildings began to deteriorate. Hence, until the late seventies, architects and architectural historians ignored or, even worse, sneered at America's roadside architecture.

By 1980, when historians began looking at roadside architecture in general and U.S. 66 in particular, the buildings along 66 were in pretty bad shape. The interstate highways were nearing completion. Only in Arizona and parts of Texas did the highway still go along Main Street. The triple punch dealt by Eisenhower's interstates, Johnson's beautification act, and Blake's diatribes led to the mansarding of the American roadside—the application of mansard roofs and other architectural decorations to highway buildings in an effort to make them visually respectable and economically viable under new conditions. Where the interstate left sections of the old highway totally abandoned, with a separation of several miles between the two, the architecture of the 1926–56 era survived without alteration. These stretches of highway became roadside "museums," housing relics from another era.

The architecture on U.S. 66 falls into eight overlapping regional sections, each with distinctive characteristics. First there was the local road between Chicago and Litchfield, Illinois; then there was the St. Louis urban region, which extended east and west of the city; then came the Ozark region between Rolla and Joplin, Missouri; the Great Plains between the Missouri-Kansas border and Albuquerque, New Mexico; Pueblo country, north and west of Albuquerque; the Main Street/railroad towns of western New Mexico and Arizona; the Mojave Desert west of Needles, California; and, finally, a second local stretch between San Bernardino and Los Angeles.

Within each region there were two strains of roadside architecture. The first was a truly vernacular architecture, drawing from indigenous houses in the region and often using materials available only in the region: the Illinois tavern in brick or clapboard, the Ozark Sandstone House, the Western Bungalow, the Spanish/Pueblo House, the Western Ranch House, the California Casa, and the California Bungalow. The second strain was a stylish architecture, drawing on the current fashion in roadside architecture: the revivals—Spanish Colonial, American Colonial, and Tudor; the Streamline Moderne and the International Style. The owners of these buildings, found most often within fifty miles of urban centers, frequently hired local architects or engineers to help with the design. Sometimes the architects drew on indigenous designs; most often they opted for fashion.

Of the revivals, only the Spanish Colonial grew out of indigenous architectures along 66 to become a national style. The eighteenth-century Spanish Mission and the California Casa with their enclosed courtyards lined with rooms provided the ideal model for the early-twentieth-century motel with a central courtyard. Generally constructed of wood frame or adobe brick or clay tile and covered in stucco to imitate adobe, the Spanish Colonial motel was cheap to build.[9] Along the urban stretch between San Bernardino and Los Angeles and in cities like Albuquerque, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and St. Louis, variations on Spanish Colonial were the stylish architectures of choice in the 1920s and 1930s. Occasionally, New Mexicans found that Spanish Pueblo houses, characterized by round roof rafters, *vigas*, that penetrated the unfired brick walls and showed on the exterior, made good motel rooms when built in adobe and stucco. After World War II, the eighteenth-century California Casa,

which provided the model for the American ranch house, also provided a model for the postwar motel clear across the country.[10]

The break from traditional folk architecture came as the depression eased into the forties and business owners, particularly café owners, turned to Streamline Moderne. Introduced to the American public by industrial designers Raymond Loewy, Walter Dorwin Teague, and others at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933–34 and at the New York World's Fair five years later, the Streamline Moderne style projected the future and better times.[11] The style was characterized by sleek, shiny surfaces and rounded corners molded in stucco or turned in glazed tile. The style was an outgrowth of the Spanish Colonial coupled to a depression-era fascination with the sleek curved lines used in the industrial design of cars and appliances and with factory-made materials such as glass block and structural tiles used in the construction of buildings.[12] What read as Spanish Colonial in the rounded corners of the false front over the Bond-Gunderson Trading Post in 1915 in Grants, New Mexico, read as Streamline Moderne in the similar, rounded false front over the Site Oil Company service station in 1940 in Edwardsville, Illinois.

Streamline Moderne was particularly popular in St. Louis, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City, where there was more money to spend on architecture than there was in rural regions. The urban influence on rural roadside buildings, particularly that of St. Louis, extended about fifty miles into the countryside. Hence the St. Louis region was anchored by two superb Streamline structures—the 66 Terminal Truck Stop in rural Staunton, Illinois, thirty-five miles northeast of St. Louis and the Diamonds Truck Stop at Villa Ridge, Missouri, thirty-five miles west of St. Louis.

With the end of World War II, as the forties eased into the fifties, American GIs returned home, packed up their families, moved to their suburban ranch houses, and took to the road on their annual paid vacations. Roadside entrepreneurs responded with new architectural forms—the ranch house motel designed to look like a little bit of home, the International Style motel office and café, and giant neon signs. The Museum of Modern Art in New York introduced the International Style to the American public in a 1931 show that included the design of a gas station. On the roadside the International Style was characterized by the "visual front"—large sheets of plate glass on the front of motel offices, often canted outward at the top to prevent glare, inviting the traveler inside.[13] Motel owners beckoned late-night travelers off the road with tall, blinking neon signs, brightly lit glass offices, and cozy ranch house rooms outlined in neon. Café and hamburger joint owners made their places sparkle with large expanses of canted glass topped by neon cornices on which they advertised their menus.

The coming of the interstates marked the end of an architecture based on the whims, the taste, and the sweat of the roadside entrepreneur. The straight, safe dual-lane highways that replaced 66 fenced off the wayside, carried speeding traffic past every little town, and allowed Mom and Pop only limited access to their customers at designated interchanges. It was impossible to build a motel or a gas station or a café on the roadside between towns. Towns like Bridgeport, Oklahoma, a mile-long stringtown of roadside businesses with no exit from the interstate, disappeared altogether. The only place the new highways offered commercial sites was at the interchange between the interstate and Main Street. At the same time, the

first referral and franchise motels and fast-food stands appeared on the scene—the first Holiday Inn in 1952 and the first pair of Golden Arches in 1953—and with them came the beginnings of standardized roadside architecture. Cyrus Avery had called Route 66 the Main Street of America, but increasingly Mom and Pop, who owned gas stations, motels, and cafés on Main Street, lost business to those enterprises that were able to build near the highway interchanges and that snagged the traveling public before the tourists ever got to Main Street.

BUILDING TYPES

Gas Stations

When Americans took to the road in the first decade of the twentieth century, their new motorcars were fueled by gasoline, a waste product of the kerosene industry. At first motorists purchased their gasoline by the bucketful at the local livery, repair shop, or general store and funneled it into their gas tanks. In 1905, Sylanus F. Bowser took a water pump he had invented twenty years earlier and turned it into a gas pump by mounting it on a fifty-gallon container housed in a cabinet. He called his invention "the Filling Station." Other pumps followed, and soon curbside pumps proliferated outside local liveries and general stores. In Cubero, New Mexico, Sidney Gottlieb added gasoline to his inventory when automobiles began passing in front of his trading post on the Laguna Reservation. In Grants, New Mexico, the Bond-Gunderson Trading Post, which catered to ranchers, added gas pumps in front of its store in the teens. In St. Johns, Arizona, the Whiting brothers—Art, Ernest, Eddie, and Ralph—opened a gas station on the National Old Trails Road next to their box factory.[14]

In response to the popularity of the automobile and its voracious demand for gasoline, the oil industry developed distribution systems for its former waste product and a new building type—the gas station. By 1910 the basic architectural elements of the gas station were in place—an interior office and an exterior canopy covering the pumps. The exterior canopy was not always necessary and was dropped in some parts of the country to remove its obstructing columns from the pumping area. In small towns, where the service station owner fixed the locals' cars, an adjacent garage was imperative. Before the oil companies standardized their gas stations into recognizable company logos to promote brand loyalty, local entrepreneurs built their own. The Whiting brothers found they could make a little gas station for almost nothing using lumber from their father's mills, and they built a chain of them. By the mid-teens the oil companies took the basic elements—the office and the canopy—and began building standardized prefabricated glass and steel "crackerboxes" that were small, cheap, and easily assembled. Shell and Standard Oil of California were among the first to franchise out the manufacture of their crackerboxes to steel fabricators and to paint them with the company colors, thus turning them into company logos. Other manufacturers offered buildings for sale to independent dealers through catalogs.[15]

By the beginning of the thirties, the Pure Oil Company and the Phillips Petroleum Company were building standardized stations. In 1937 Texaco hired industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague to design a station. He came up with the basic design for a Streamline Moderne building that could be built in any part of the country from whatever materials were available—porcelain-enameled steel, brick, concrete block, or frame and stucco—as long as the completed building had Texaco's sleek white finish and a cornice with three green