

HERE BRIEFLY RESTS A RESTLESS TRIBE:
PRESERVING FRANK REDFORD'S WIGWAM VILLAGES

by

KIMBERLY ELLIS

(Under the Direction of WAYDE BROWN)

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of automobile travel in the early twentieth-century gave way to a new landscape and a new industry: the roadside. Business owners were now tasked with fueling, feeding and housing this new mobile clientele. As the roadside industry grew, business owners found new ways to lure a fast-moving customer base; by constructing eccentric and unconventional buildings. This thesis examines one of the most imaginative early roadside business chains, the Wigwam Villages. Strong parallels are drawn between the Wigwam Villages own development and that of the early roadside.

INDEX WORDS: Wigwam Villages, Historic Preservation, Architectural History,
Commercial History, Programmatic Architecture, Frank Redford,
American Motels

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KIMBERLY ELLIS

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KIMBERLY ELLIS

Major Professor:	Wayde Brown
Committee:	Scott Nesbit
	Bynum Boley
	Peter B. Ives

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2017

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The characters in our story are five: this American continent; this American people; the automobile; the Great American Road, and-the Great American Roadside¹.

Popular in the American imagination is the ‘road trip’. Twentieth-century literature and film portray the open road as a place of possibilities, possibilities present around each new corner. The unknown landscape creates adventure. America’s love affair with the road trip began with the advent of Ford’s Model-T. By the 1920s, Americans embraced the lasting leisure activity of touring the country from their private vehicles, and experiencing the American landscape in new ways. With this new mobile lifestyle came buildings to serve the roadside. Diners, gas stations, and motels were all built to serve the leisure traveler and created a distinctly American landscape: the roadside.

The Wigwam Village motel chain is one of the most iconic, extant vestiges of this early era of the roadside. Their unique yet crude shape, a Plains Indian Teepee, alert travelers not to their location, as none of the Villages are located on the Plains. Rather, the Wigwam Villages alert travelers that they are experiencing the American roadside, a landscape full of unapologetic kitsch. At its height, the Wigwam Village chain had seven locations. Today, there are only three. At a waning time in this once-popular chain, this thesis poses the question, “how are the Wigwam Villages a valuable resource in telling the story of the American roadside?” This thesis

¹ James Agee, “The Great American Roadside,” *Fortune Magazine* (September 1934), 172.

will answer this question by examining the Wigwam Villages then, their conditions today and what their future role may be within roadside culture. By identifying the historic and cultural values of this chain motel, an examination of its continued preservation and necessary interpretation is undertaken.

Research Parameters

The examination found in this thesis concerns the Wigwam Village chain, both sites that are no longer standing and those that are still in operation today. In total this includes seven Villages: Village Number 1 in Horse Cave, Kentucky, Number 2 in Cave City, Kentucky, Village Number 3 in New Orleans, Louisiana, Number 4 in Orlando, Florida, Number 5 in Bessemer, Alabama, Number 6 in Holbrook, Arizona and Number 7 in San Bernardino, California. The Wigwam Village chain is distinguished as those motels either owned by Frank Redford or using his patented design. Numbers 1, 2 and 7 were started by Frank Redford and the others were built in cooperation with the wishes of Redford. Only three Wigwam Villages are still in operation today, Numbers 2, 6 and 7. Figure 1.1 shows the spatial relationship of the above information.



Figure 1.1: United States map showing all Village location. Figure rendered by author.

Information was gathered through archival research and site visits. As Frank Redford kept no corporate records, one must piece together multiple sources to fully understand the operation and later the impact of the chain on the American roadside. *The Glasgow Times*, of Glasgow, Kentucky was valuable in providing newspaper articles on Wigwam Village Number 1 and 2 for its inception and later popularity. With these clippings, I was able to determine the early events and visitor experience of Number 1 and 2. The author also had the opportunity to visit Village Number 6 in Holbrook, Arizona and Village Number 7 in San Bernardino, California. While these visits were done prior to any research, the author experienced the two sites as a tourist would. These experiences provided an invaluable framework in which this thesis took shape.

While no comprehensive literature exists on the Wigwam Village chain, several authors have taken a particular academic interest in the Villages. Keith A. Sculle, John Jakle and Katie

Algeo have written chapters or published academic articles with their scholarly research. *Oral History: A Key to Writing the History of American Roadside Architecture*, compiled by Keith A. Sculle in the 1980s was an extremely revealing tool. Sculle interviewed former owners, staff and locals on their memories of the Villages, something that could not be replicated today, as most of the former staff have passed on. Katie Algeo's *Indian for a Night: Sleeping with the "Other" at Wigwam Village Tourist Cabins* leveraged studies in Native American and American identity to talk about the business. Her work, published in 2009, provided a symbolic approach to guests' experiences.

The cult following of kitschy, early roadside architecture greatly aided in the completion of this thesis. The fandom surrounding the American roadside has resulted in numerous books, clubs and photography sharing groups. The website Flickr was the largest collection of early tourist photos and postcards in a group called "Wigwam Village Motels (Frank Redford Design)." In this group, users from around the world share their private collections of early Wigwam postcards, souvenirs, and family tourist photos along with contemporary photography. Some of this memorabilia are the only surviving links to the demolished Wigwams. All photos taken from this group were provided with permission from the owners.

The Wigwam Village chain is placed into its historic context by using American roadside literature, a relatively new academic pursuit. For the purpose of this thesis, literature on hotel history, programmatic architecture, advertising and Native American social studies were pursued. Along with this academic literature, early architectural publications were also examined to determine the field of roadside accommodations at the time of the Villages. By examining early plans for similar businesses, I was able to determine how the Wigwams fit into this architectural legacy.

Two books were primarily used when referencing the early days of roadside lodging: Warren J. Belasco's *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* and John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle and Jefferson S. Roger's *The Motel in America*. Warren Belasco is professor emeritus in American Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. *Americans on the Road*, published in 1979, was the first thoroughly researched and documented work on early lodging. This book is broken down chronologically, first looking at roadside camping and finishing with the beginning of the modern day motel industry. This book provided a chronological framework as well as a look into the decline of the hotel as it related to the motel industry.

John Jakle and Keith Sculle have published numerous books on the early roadside with topics ranging from gas stations, parking garages and fast food restaurants. Their book, *The Motel in America* looks at the motel's origins, its evolution as a form, its changing geographical distribution and the associated changing social meanings. They divide their book by first looking at the motel as architecture. Clear themes and commonalities are found when looking at the history of the motels form and spatial arrangement. Next, this book examines the evolution of the motel industry from a 'mom-and-pop' enterprise to the early motel franchise. Through this work, the Wigwam Villages were provided historic context in which they could be adequately compared.

Another author heavily relied on is John Margolies, author of *Home Away From Home: Motels in America*, *The End of the Road*, and *Pump and Circumstance*. Primarily a photographer, Margolies' books served as visual inspiration and guides for understanding roadside vernacular architecture. His books and photographs started in the 1970s and specifically target the absurd, also called programmatic architecture. Along with Margolies, Jim Heimann and Rip Georges'

book *California Crazy: Roadside Vernacular Architecture* introduced the symbolism behind mimetic architecture. This book also introduced the term programmatic and is still used today when writing about mimetic architecture. Although this book focuses on those structures found in California, the book was valuable in introducing the forms and themes common across America and how they are applied to Frank Redford's design.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two is dedicated to the chronological development of the Wigwam Villages. Chapter Three examines the development of the early motel industry and the parallels linked with the Wigwam Villages own development. Using contemporary trade journals and architectural building literature, the popular forms and themes in the early motel industry are examined. By taking a closer look at this early motel industry, the important role the Wigwam Villages play in this history is understood. Included in this chapter are the development of the motel form in the 1920s and 1930s from cabin courts to mom and pop motels to franchising and standardization. The Wigwam Village follows this development closely and thus could be considered an archetype of the small American motel chain. Also, Frank Redford's 1936 motel design patent will be examined, as this was a legal step in securing the standardization of his chain.

To truly understand the historic values in this motel chain, it is useful to categorize its unique design and contextualize it within other similar roadside businesses from this era. Chapter Four is dedicated to the style of architecture that evolved along the roadside to capture the attention of audiences traveling at high speeds. This new "Architecture for Speed-Reading", also called programmatic architecture, created a marriage between advertising and architecture; a

building's exterior reflected the services that could be rendered inside. In the 1920s and 1930s, the American roadside was thus transformed into a fantastical landscape with diners in the shape of tamales, cafes in the shape of coffee pots, ice cream shops in the shape of ice cream cones and motels that resembled the sleeping place of the nomadic Plains Indian, the teepee. This chapter will look at other examples of programmatic architecture and their waning popularity on the roadside.

The Wigwam Village chain was not the first, nor the last, business to appropriate Native American themes to build a brand. While the Wigwam Villages bear a name associated with Native American dwellings, they are neither a Wigwam in form, nor a nomadic shelter. While the first half of Chapter Four looks at the building as an advertisement, the second half examines the social message the Wigwam Villages convey to commuters in their design. The adoption of strongly Native American themes was not arbitrarily chosen. I will also address the possible metaphors present when Americans stay in this motel.

Chapter Five explores the condition of the three remaining Villages, Number 2 in Cave City, Kentucky, Number 6 in Holbrook, Arizona and Number 7 in San Bernardino, California. All three have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places at varying times. Each nomination form will be assessed on their historic criteria, accuracy, and additional information that could be added to the nominations to make them more comprehensive. I survey the present-day conditions and assess their integrity using the Department of the Interior Seven Aspects of Integrity.

Finally, Chapter Six will address the relatively new field of roadside preservation. By understanding the climate for early roadside preservation, some resources for the Wigwam Villages continued success will be identified. This chapter will also look at the current historic

interpretation, or the lack thereof, at the three extant Villages. Some suggestions will be made on how to relay the historic significance of the sites to the visiting public. Along with visitor engagement, a look at missed opportunities for engaging the public online will also be examined.

CHAPTER 2: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WIGWAM VILLAGE CHAIN

The first, second and seventh Wigwam Villages were built by Frank Redford. Born in 1899, Redford was born into a farm family from Muncie, Indiana. At the age of two, the Redfords moved to rural Hart County, Kentucky.² After high school, Redford worked for the United Fruit Company in Honduras where he stayed until his father died, at which point he returned home to Kentucky. On a trip to California with his mother, the pair visited Long Beach where they saw a teepee shaped lunch stand with two smaller restroom teepees. Torn down in 1950, these structures were built sometime in the 1920s at the corner of Covina and Fifty-Second Place.³ Back in his hometown, Mammoth Cave was authorized as a national park in 1926 and was fully established in 1941. Upon returning to Kentucky, Redford saw an opportunity to serve this burgeoning tourist clientele.

The first Wigwam Village (referenced as Number 1) started out as only a lunchroom and gas station. Built in 1933 in Horse Cave, Kentucky, both the lunchroom and the gas station were built to resemble the teepee business Redford saw in Long Beach. The lunchroom was a sixty-foot-high steel-reinforced cone patched with stucco. The stucco was meant to resemble the traditional hide used by the indigenous tribes of the American Plains and the Canadian Prairies

² Keith A. Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain: A Link in the Modernization of the American Roadside." In *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture*, ed. Jan Jennings (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 126.

³ Claudia R. Brown and Keith A. Sculle, "Wigwam Village No. 2." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Kentucky Heritage Council, Frankfort, February 5, 1988.

of North America. There is no written explanation as to why Frank Redford chose the name Wigwam for his lunchroom, as the building did not resemble a traditional wigwam in form or material.

The lunchroom was reported to be popular among both locals and tourists. The business was so popular that a customer suggested Redford add some sleeping rooms to his business for extra profit. Redford, seeing an opportunity to grow his business by participating in the new tourist court industry, complied. In 1935, six thirty-foot-high teepee shaped sleeping rooms were erected and arranged in a wide-arc behind the dining room and gas station. Two additional bathroom teepees were put up on either side of the lunchroom, one for squaws and one for braves. Later, a small wooden stand was added in the front as an “Indian Trading Post”, aimed at adding profit through the sale of ice cream, soft drinks and “Indian souvenirs”.⁴ The success of his design led Redford to apply for a patent in 1936.

⁴ Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain", 127.

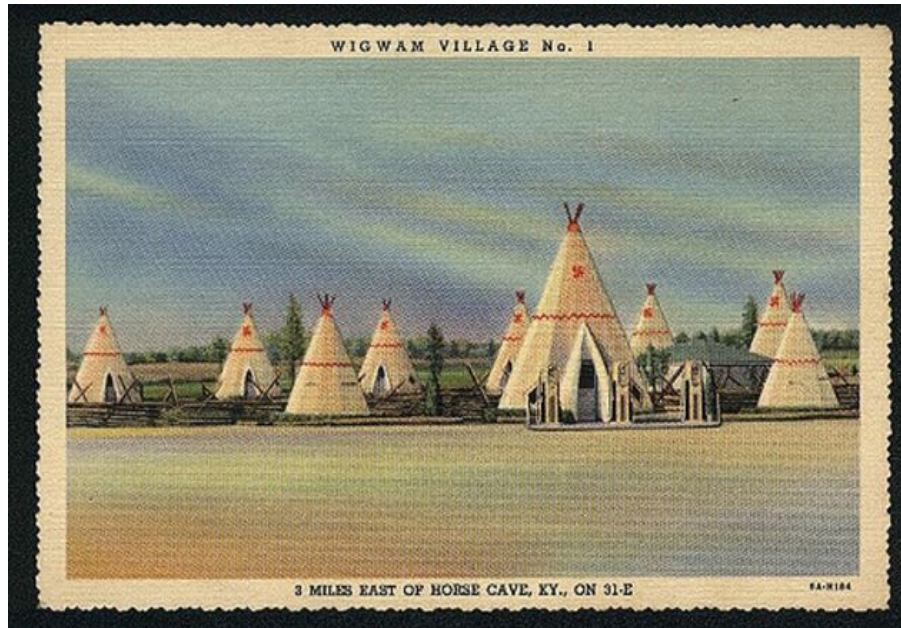


Figure 2.1: An early postcard featuring two bathroom teepees flanking the large lunchroom and gas station along with six sleeping cabins. Note the painted swastikas on all units, phased out in Redford's design after the Nazi's use of the symbol. Figure courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58QpFR>.

The second Wigwam Village was built in 1937 in Cave City, Kentucky, only five miles from Number 1. Built on highway 31W, Redford predicted that the state was likely to develop and maintain this route better than 31E, where Number 1 was situated. Number 2 was conceived as a whole, and was much larger than Number 1. The Cave City location featured a large lunchroom with seating between 20 and 30, a basement underneath to serve as a gift shop, gas station pumps in front, the same two squaw and braves bathrooms on either side, a small trading post and 15 sleeping cabins arranged in a semicircle around the public space. Village Number 2 is one of the three Villages that are still in operation today. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

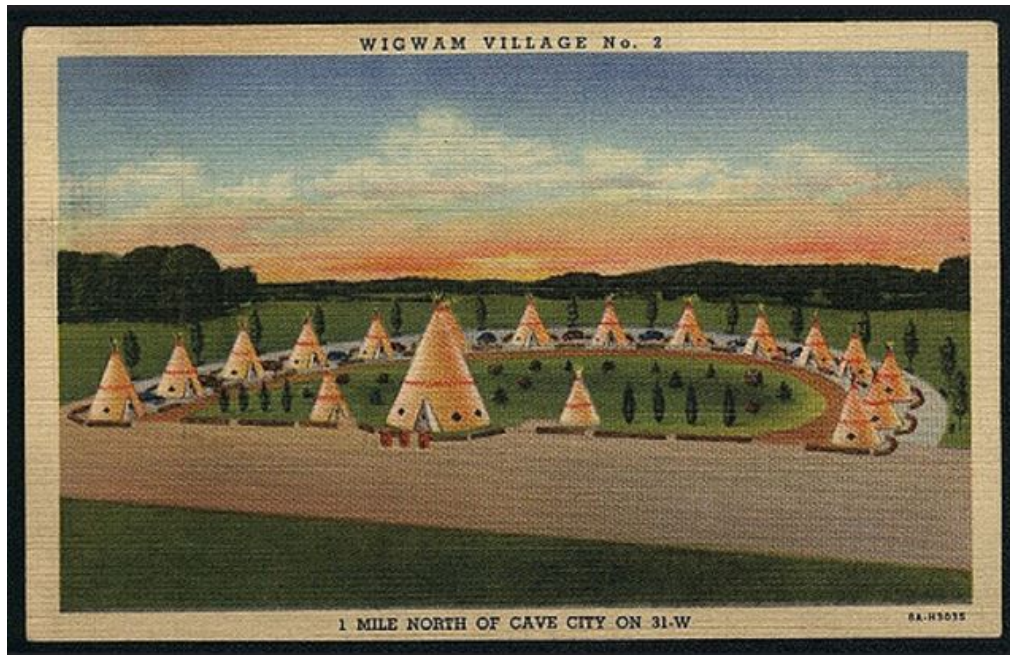


Figure 2.2: An early postcard of Number 2 featuring a much larger site. Figure courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58UABJ>.

With the patent for his wigwam motel theme open for all, Redford curiously did not actively seek business partners. Instead, he waited for interested entrepreneurs to approach him with their intentions.⁵ The first use of the patent by an outside business owner was Number 3, built in 1940 in New Orleans, Louisiana. There is little documentation of this Wigwam but early postcards reveal that it adhered to the building design and site layout from Redford's specifications. Wigwam Village Number 4 was by far the largest Village with 27 sleeping rooms in Orlando, Florida. Built in a pre-Disney Orlando, this Wigwam Village boasted its location among the orange groves (along with its own grove in which all of the juices in the cafe were from) and slated itself the largest accommodation in Orlando. The fifth Wigwam Village was built in Bessemer, Alabama with fifteen sleeping cabins, arranged in a semicircle around the lunchroom and bathrooms. The builders deviated from Redford's design during construction

⁵ Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain", 129.

when they changed the building material from steel and plaster and lath, to steel, wood, felt and then canvas with a generous application of linseed oil.⁶ The sixth and last Wigwam Village owned and operated by an outside business owner, was built in 1950 in Holbrook, Arizona, on historic Route 66. Number 6 has fifteen sleeping rooms arranged in a half-rectangle. Originally, the site followed Redford's design but over the years the lunchroom teepee was taken down and a rectangular office was put in its place. Number 6 is one of the three Villages extant and continues to operate. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.

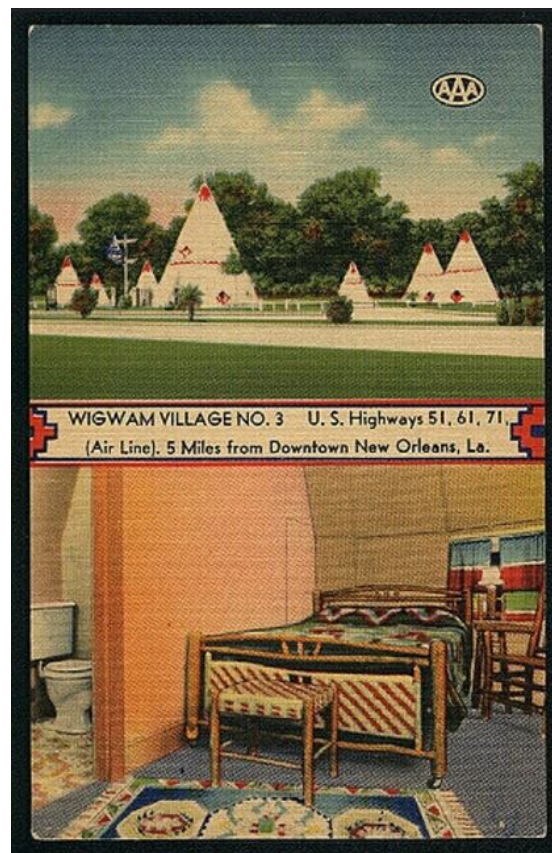


Figure 2.3: A rare look at Wigwam Number 3, the first to close, just fourteen years after it was built in 1954. Figure courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58UBTd>.

⁶ Keith A. Sculle, "Oral History: A Key to Writing the History of American Roadside Architecture" *Journal of American Culture* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1990), 82.



Figure 2.4: A postcard of Wigwam Number 4, the largest Village with twenty-seven units. Figure courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58UBTd>.

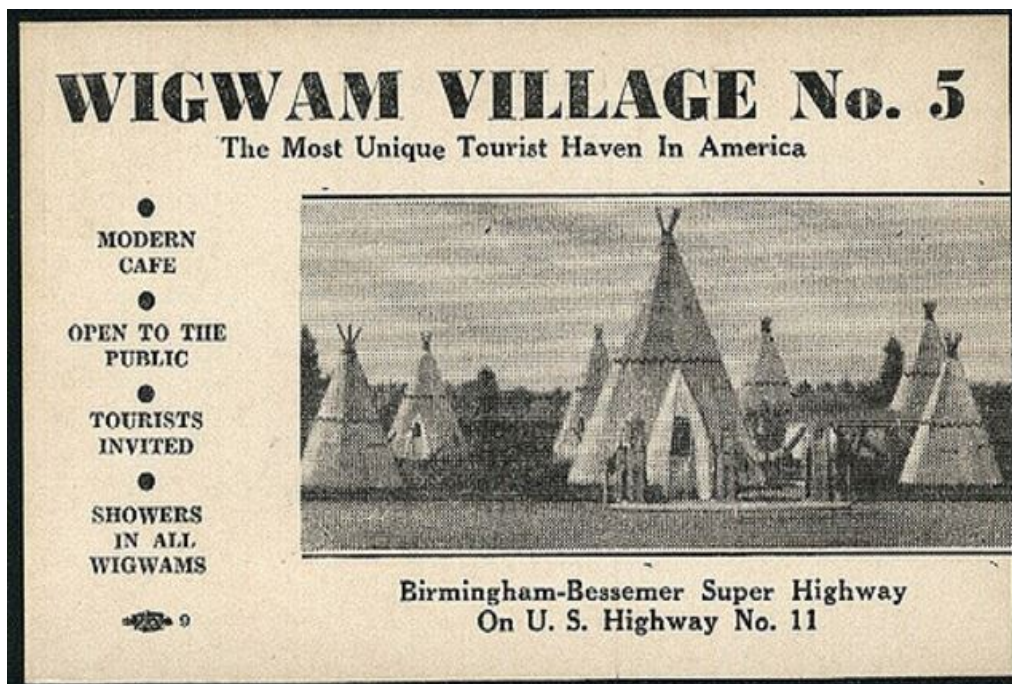


Figure 2.5: An early advertisement of Number 5 boasts its amenities. Figure courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58Qxjx>.

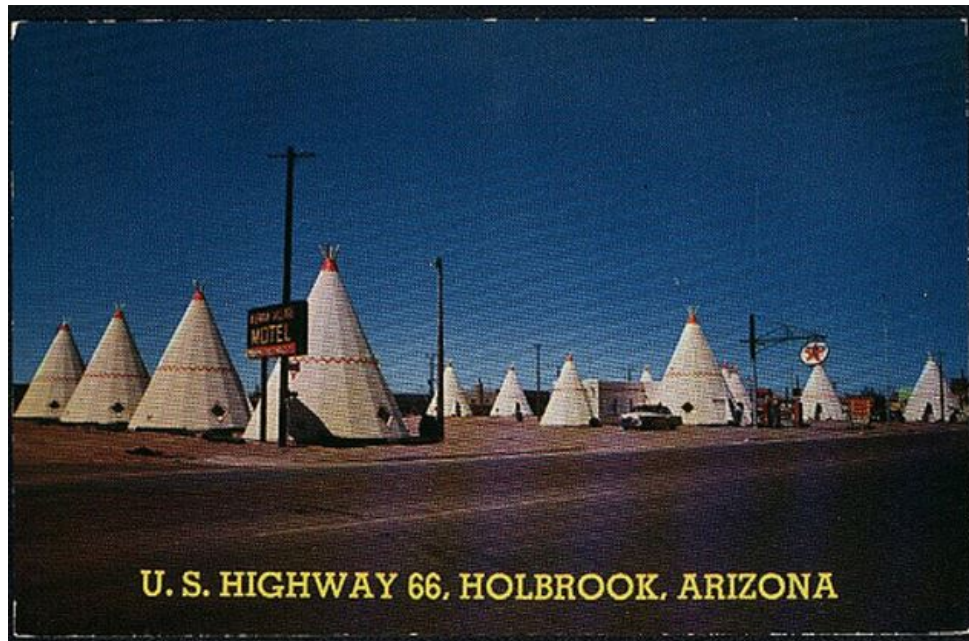


Figure 2.6: A 1960s postcard from Number 6, the back boasts of its location as being “in the Heart of the Indian Country”. Figure courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58QwLx>.

The seventh and last Wigwam Village was built in 1950 by Frank Redford on Route 66 in Rialto, California. This site features 19 of the well-known teepee sleeping rooms arranged in the customary arc surrounding a public space. Redford strayed from his original design by building a rectangular building with a flat roof to house the office and gift shop. Immediately behind and attached to the office is the largest teepee which was built to be a two-story apartment for Redford. Redford lived in this apartment until his death in 1958. Village Number 7 is one of the three remaining Villages in operation, added to the National Register in 2012.



Figure 2.7: Parking and communal space shown at Wigwam Number 7. Figure courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58QwLx>.

CHAPTER 3: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROADSIDE LODGING INDUSTRY

This chapter is broken into two parts: the development of the American motel industry followed by the development of the Wigwam Villages. This chapter will first describe the chronological development of the roadside lodging industry. This journey will begin with the advent of the leisure road traveler in the 1910s and end around the standardization of the motel industry in the years following World War II. The Wigwam Villages own development mirrors that of the motel industry's maturation. The Villages also provide a link between the early mom-and-pop motor courts and the large chain motels seen today. By first describing the development of the motel industry followed by the Villages history, clear parallels can be deduced. By connecting these two histories, the inherent historic value of the Wigwam Villages is revealed.

By 1913, there were 1,194,000 motor vehicles registered and on the move in the United States.⁷ A short ten years later there were roughly 10 million operating on American roads.⁸ While motoring was catching up to be the preferred means of daily travel, vacationing on the road was a hobby almost exclusively held by the affluent. Before the era of mass motoring, serviced by an intricate commercial infrastructure, the early countryside tourist would camp on the side of the road. Affectionately called 'gypsyng', the lack of services available was actually

⁷ John Margolies, *Home away from home: motels in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 14.

⁸ Jakle, John A., and Keith A. Sculle. *Remembering roadside America: preserving the recent past as landscape and place*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011.

part of the appeal of the 1910s and 1920s leisure traveler. Also referred to as “auto tramping” or “nomadic motoring”⁹, leisure travelers sought to address their perceived inherent primitive urges by communing with nature and tasting nomadic life. This nostalgic group of travelers saw the open road as a way of exhibiting their freedom and rebelling against Victorian ideals. According to the early camper, “to go sliding around in the mud, careening around mountains, wearing old clothes, getting good and dirty, and living off the land, was to defy the hotel veranda, with its fancy-dress parade and genteel idleness.”¹⁰



Figure 3.1: Roadside campsite, Colorado 1917. Figure from U.S. Forest Service via *Americans on the Road*, 14.

For those less inclined to revisit their primal urges, the hotel in town was still a viable option. Originally built to accommodate railroad travelers, hotels were often situated in dense areas and most made no special provisions for automobiles. When guests arrived by car to many

⁹ Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

traditional hotels in the years prior to World War I, their vehicles were turned over to doormen who drove the cars to distant livery stables or unsecure storage garages.¹¹ Large towns and small cities commonly subsidized the building of hotels in the 1920s, intending them to stand as landmarks symbolic of economic and social vigor.¹² Thus, hotels of this kind often featured ostentatious design and over the top luxury. The overbuilding of these hotels in the 1920s, produced an oversupply of hotel rooms in the nation's larger cities just in time for the stock market crash of 1929.¹³

The Great Depression, the birth of America motoring along with changing social expectations greatly impacted the established hotel industry. By 1932, 80 percent of all hotel mortgages were in default, 15 percent could not meet payrolls and 32 percent of hotels could not cover property taxes from revenues.¹⁴ Car travelers were no longer interested in the rigid and formal check in processes required of them after a long day of driving. Even in the more informal American West, hotels required white shirts, collars, ties, and business suits for men and skirts and blouses for women, much to the chagrin of the disheveled and tired car travelers.¹⁵ For this reason, informal auto camps and early motels greatly ate into the hotel customer base. The low costs of the former encouraged hotels to cut their prices to meet the competition. This price-cutting severely undermined the ability of hotel owners to repair or upgrade their buildings, leading to a general decrease in quality in America's Main Street hotels.¹⁶

¹¹ John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle and Jefferson S. Rogers, *The Motel in America*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 47.

¹⁶ Jakle, Sculle, Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 31.



Figure 3.2: The Book-Cadillac Hotel, Detroit, circa 1930. The ostentatious ornamentation of the hotel discouraged disheveled travelers. Figure from *The Motel in America*, 27.

The Great Depression paired with the rise of automobile travelers created a welcome environment for roadside entrepreneurs. Vehicle registration quadrupled from 4.6 million in 1917 to 19.2 million in 1926.¹⁷ It was during the late 1920s and 1930s that auto touring switched from a hobby enjoyed by only the affluent to one in which middle and often lower classes participated, sometimes out of necessity. Roped-off free municipal camps turned into fee collecting sites due to the migratory transients and other undesirables who were displaced by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Like the Joad family in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, transients stayed at campgrounds for extended periods of time, their household goods crammed into ancient, unattractive vehicles. While the affluent of the 1920s and early 1930s took to gypsying for its romantic qualities, the new gypsy did so as a way to deal with serious economic and social problems.¹⁸ Once conceived as a democratic hobby, camp travel was now stratified by those that could afford and those that could not afford pay camps. By 1925, most campsites now

¹⁷ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 106.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

charged a fee and enforced restrictions on length of stays.¹⁹ What was at one time an anti-institutional sport, auto touring was now its own rigid institution. Once fees were implemented, entrepreneurs and private operators were incentivized to join the roadside industry.



Figure 3.3: Congested campgrounds, such as this one in the San Bernardino National Forest in California, greatly encouraged travelers to seek private accommodations. Figure from *Home Away From Home*, 25.

With increased competition from these pay-camps, camp owners discovered that travelers were willing to pay an additional fee for more private accommodations.²⁰ It was at this time camp owners began to erect rudimentary cabins for their guests, available for fifty to seventy-cents a night. These first-generation cabins, starting in the mid to late 1920s, were sometimes nothing more than an unfurnished one-room shack with dirt floors. Auto campers would often provide their own cots, chairs and camp stoves or rent these amenities from the business for an

¹⁹ Jakle, Sculle, Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 34.

²⁰ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American roadside architecture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 174.

additional charge.²¹ For a slightly higher fee of one dollar a night, visitors could rent a furnished cabin with a simple iron bed and straw-stuffed mattress, chairs, a table, a pitcher of water and sometimes a gas plate.²² By the 1920s, it was standard for summer resort camps to provide these kinds of amenities for tourists staying for a week or more. After 1930, the idea of well-equipped cabins with the comforts of home began to spread and became a nightly tourist expectation. By the 1930s many former camp operators stopped providing tent sites altogether and began exclusively offering motorists these cabins.²³ These comfortable cabins then marked the end of auto camping as a hobby and the beginning of the motel industry in America.²⁴ By 1933, it was estimated that more than 400,000 of these individual shacks dotted that American landscape and the American Automobile Association listed over 4,000 approved camps in their 1933 listing.²⁵



Figure 3.4: Rudimentary shacks were offered behind this Zapata, Texas gas station. Figure from *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 174.

²¹ "Roadside Cabins for Tourists." *The Architectural Record* (December 1933), 457.

²² Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 131.

²³ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 174.

²⁴ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 131.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

These cabin camps were not without their critics. The 1920s and 1930s were characterized by a shift in sexual mores and the early motels were viewed by many as potential sites for immorality.²⁶ The anonymity that many courts offered created concern by the religious right and the traditionalists fearful of the loss of moral codes. Unlike hotels, most auto courts did not ask for registration information nor did unmarried couples have to parade through a judgmental lobby. Magazines and unscientific studies alarmed the fearful about this new industry that housed illicit sex between unmarried couples, the roadside became the new Sodom and Gomorrah. A 1936 study published in the *Studies in Sociology Journal* described the auto courts of the Dallas region on a typical Saturday night. On the basis of figures derived from different camps across the city, the average turnover for the typical cabin was over 1.5. The study deduced that since there were 579 cabins in the city, about 875 Dallas couples engage in illicit sexual relations on a normal Saturday night.²⁷ Students who conducted this survey supported this assumption based on the number of vehicles with local Dallas plates in the parking lot of a camp, a vast majority. In one camp, the owner reported that he had turned over a single cabin 16 times in one Saturday.²⁸ J. Edgar Hoover also played a role in marring the roadside lodging industry's reputation with an article in *American Magazine* called "Camps of Crime". Known for his hyperbole, Hoover labeled motels as "a new home of crime in America, a new home of disease, bribery, corruption, crookedness, rape, white slavery, thievery, and murder."²⁹

To combat this image, many motel chains organized themselves in order to promote a clean and wholesome reputation for their trade.³⁰ To differentiate themselves from the pay-by-

²⁶ Jakle, Sculle, Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 58.

²⁷ Elbert L. Hooker, "The Urban Tourist Camp," *Studies in Sociology* 1, no. 1 (July 1936): 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁹ J. Edgar Hoover, "Camps of Crime." *American Magazine* (February 1940)

³⁰ Jakle, Sculle, Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 59.

the-hour motels, some businesses began to enforce morality rules such as barring alcohol. Others began to require registration including name, address and license plates which allowed them to refuse locals and travelers without bags. In 1939, *The Tourist Court Journal* pleaded with court owners to be vigilant about their morality laws for “eventually even casual observers will see the obvious difference between flop houses and established businesses.”³¹ Members who joined a referral network pledged to maintain these agreed-upon standards and display the group’s emblem.³² United Motor Courts, started in 1933, was one of the most popular referral chains that vetted independently owned courts with the “highest standards in comfort, quiet atmosphere, and courteous service.”³³

Many early motel owners were married couples. In these motels, work was split up evenly among both men and women. Early commercial hotels were traditionally male spaces while early cabin courts were sold to be cozy and have homelike gestures such as chintz curtains, doilies on the dresser, rockers and playground equipment.³⁴ While the men owners traditionally built and maintained the lodgings, the women owners created a space that put other women at ease. These small gestures were essential in attracting the family trade.³⁵ Women’s entrepreneurial presence in the industry also advanced camp plumbing from 1925 to 1940. Operators at this time pointed to the female owners and female travelers for being the key influencers.³⁶ Women were also instrumental in the success of the roadside lodging industry

³¹ Teets, John N. "The Motor Court Moderne; Designed for the Needs of Tomorrow and Today." *Tourist Court Journal*, March 1938, 11.

³² Jakle, Sculle, Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 139.

³³ *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁴ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 137.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

during World War II as many of the male operators were drafted to war. Many hotels suffered during the War because men managed almost all of a hotel's business.



Figure 3.5: This advertisement for the George-Anna Cottages in Jackson Tennessee used roadside domesticity to draw in the family trade. To prove their wholesome morality, these court owners named the business after their children, George and Anna. Figure from *The Motel in America*, 65.

Most early cabins were designed by non-professionals, people who owned land that luckily abutted a new road. For these novice roadside lodging owners, literature of the times provided low-cost cabin plans for business novices to earn extra income during the summer months.³⁷ Some tourist camp pioneers already owned roadside businesses such as diners or gas stations and chose to build sleeping facilities to augment profits.³⁸ Roadside business owners learned that it was best to provide the most variety of products and services because tired tourists valued one-stop night accommodations. Building literature at the time not only encouraged this,

³⁷ "Tourist Cabins that get the business." *Popular Mechanics*, July 1935, 151.

³⁸ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 130.

but also provided detailed site plans to accommodate all these businesses from the onset.³⁹ The Bulletin of the Beaux Arts Institute identified the principal elements of a tourist camps as follows: diner with seating for 150 at least 50 feet from road, lounge with fireplace, office, and apartment for superintendent, gas station located near entrance and four different types of cabins.⁴⁰ The architectural plans, Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7, mark the beginning of the professionalization of the cabin camp industry.

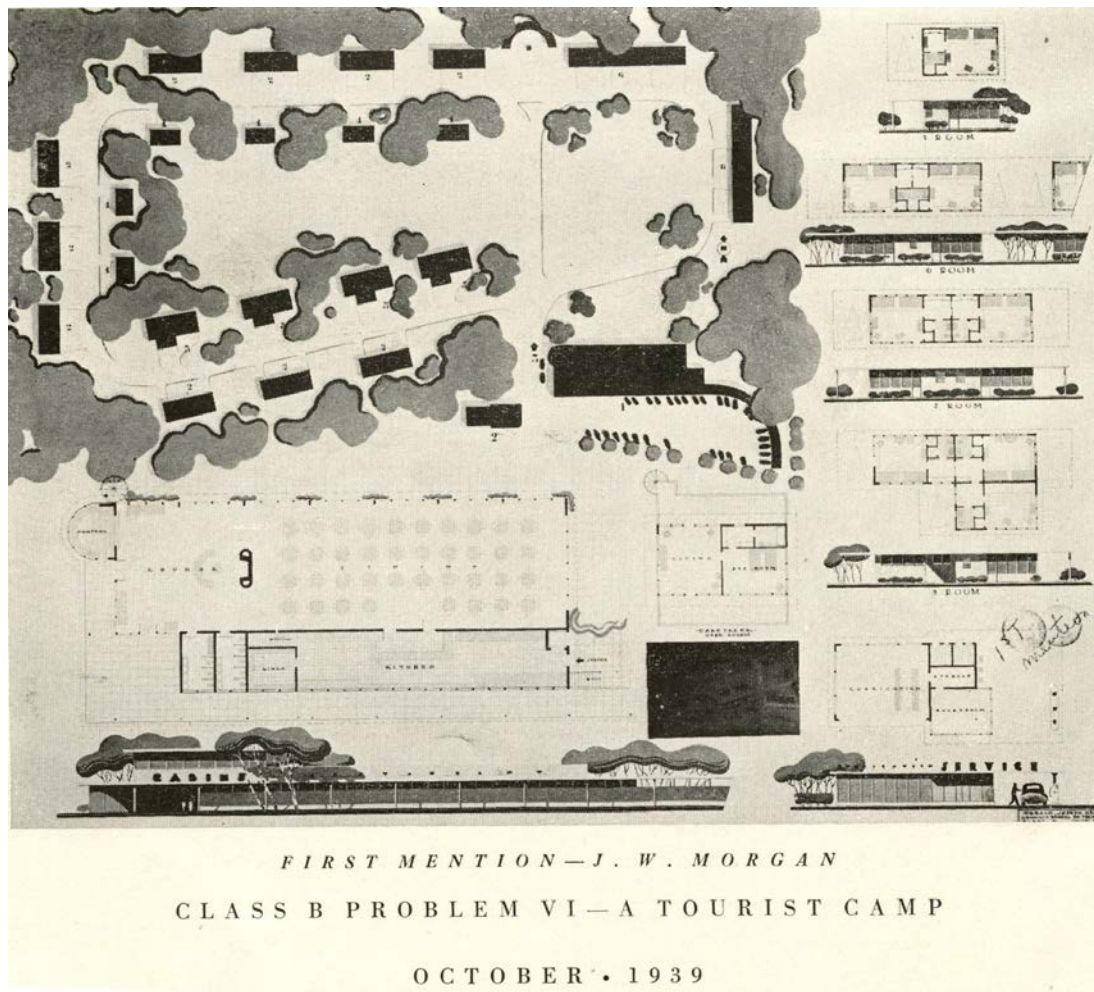


Figure 3.6: Tourist campsite plan, 1939. Figure from *The Beaux-Arts Institute of Design Bulletin*, March 1928, 18.

³⁹ "Portfolio of Special Building Types." *Architectural Record* 77 (February 1935): 96.

⁴⁰ "Competition, A tourist camp in a national forest." *Beaux-Arts Institute of Design Bulletin* 4 (March 1928): 18.

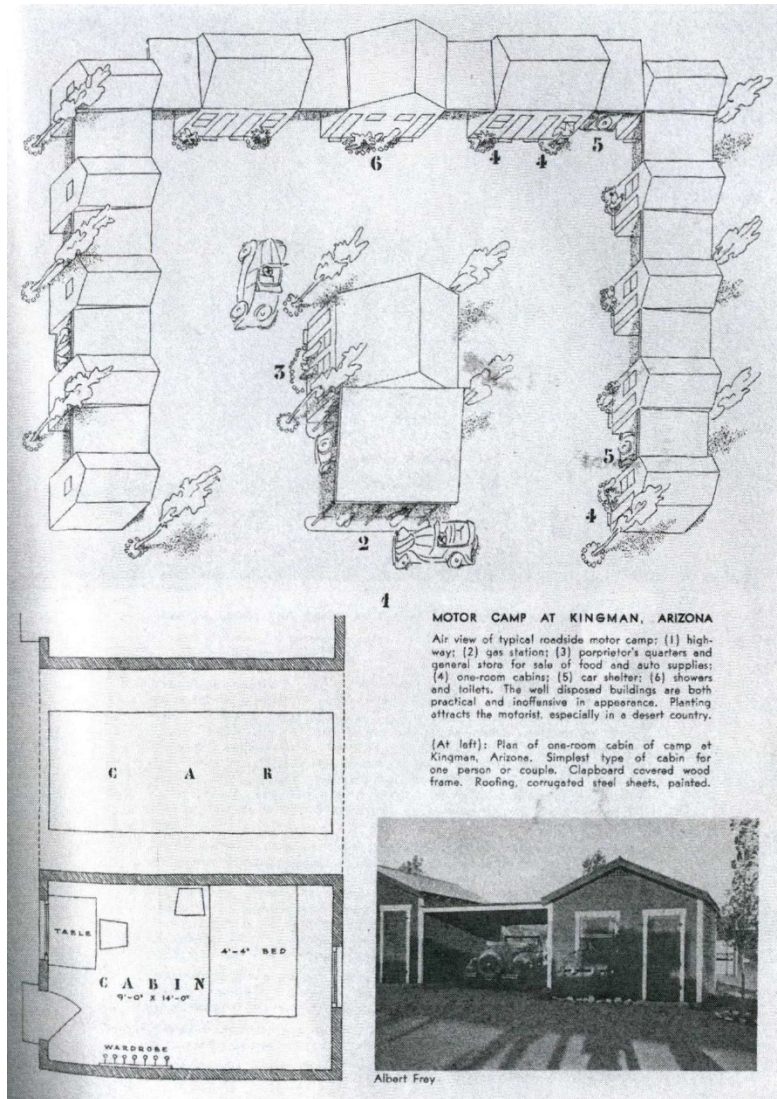


Figure 3.7: Tourist campsite plan, 1933. Figure from *The Architectural Record*, "Roadside Cabins for Tourists", December 1933, 457.

Also considered in building literature of the 1930s and 1940s were the aesthetic treatments of these early motels. Trade journals applying the use of thematic treatments did not establish a relationship between location and treatment. Instead, designs were to be applied nationally, regardless of the history or the physical geography of the site.⁴¹ Common themes

⁴¹ Keith A. Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain: A Link in the Modernization of the American Roadside." In *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture*, ed. Jan Jennings (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 120.

were rustic, colonial, southwestern, western, modern or bungalow. While the building literature recommended the use of all of these themes, there was little information on novelty architecture, similar to Frank Redford's teepee design. Instead, the only mention of this programmatic architecture in architectural guides was in a 1950s examination at the past designs with a look towards modernization⁴². The early lack of acknowledgment from the professional community makes Frank Redford's design a truly vernacular phenomenon.

As the motel industry began to blossom, so too did the rigid planning and standardization of these sites. Instead of the haphazard jumble of tents and scattered cabins, owners began to plan ahead and conceive of their businesses as a whole. The late-1930s to mid-1940s period offered an array of literature available to entrepreneurs. *The Tourist Court Journal*, started in 1937 by the International Motor Court Association, was one such source that offered detailed plans for cabins and also for site layout. *American Carpenter and Builder* (later called *American Builder*), *Architectural Record* and *Architectural Forum* all featured articles on new motel forms. By the late 1940s, individually detached sleeping accommodations were discouraged in building literature in exchange for architectural mass, or vertical building.⁴³ Through the 1950s, building literature increasingly warned small motel owners of the impending construction of the "bigger and better"⁴⁴ motor hotel that boosts its profits by constructing multi-story, streamlined buildings.

By 1950, the roadside-lodging industry was ripe for modernization. Modernization in this sense took one of three forms: referral, franchise or company-owned chains.⁴⁵ Referral has its

⁴² Frederic Arden Pawley, "Building Types Study No. 159, Motels." *Architectural Record* 107, no. 3 (March 1950), 111.

⁴³ Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain", 123.

⁴⁴ Pawley, "Building Types Study", 112.

⁴⁵ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 185.

origin in the 1930s with groups such as the United Motor Courts, Best Western and AAA banding together under common names, logos and their own directories. Chronologically the next step was franchises, under which a local investor would put up the capital to erect a motel according to the “design, accommodation, service, and maintenance standards of the corporation granting the franchise.”⁴⁶ Holiday Inn (1952) and Howard Johnson (1953) were two of the most successful of these early franchises. Lastly, direct ownership, when all motels within a chain are owned and operated by one company, became even more common in the mid-1950s. Companies with greater financial resources, such as Sheraton, bypassed many of the problems that the smaller husband-and-wife operations were plagued with in the past. By the late 1950s, the direct ownership companies turned to mid-rise construction with minimal imagery on the exterior (Howard Johnson being the exception). The absence of exterior imagery was a departure from the early motor courts, which relied heavily on their exterior appeal to catch customers.

The Wigwam Villages

The roots of the roadside lodging industry lie in the search for the authentic. Early roadside campers left their comfortable lives to experience America by way of camping beside their cars on the new open road. Redford’s first Village, built in the 1930s, was designed at a time when many Americans praised pre-Industrial life.⁴⁷ The Wigwam Village’s success hinges on this primal urge to reconnect with a shared history, in this case, the created story of Native Americans. Redford referred to his Villages as “camps”, capitalizing on the old-time neighborliness that travelers sought.⁴⁸ Visitors were and still are encouraged to use the open

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain", 126.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

grassy area, inside the arc of sleeping cabins and behind the diners and gas stations to sit and talk with other travelers. The well-maintained landscape resulted in weekend croquet matches between visitors and local patrons, as reported in Wigwam Number 2. Additional features such as playgrounds, benches and fire pits directly encourage travelers to interact with each other outside. This communal incentive harkens directly to the early days of auto camping in the municipal pay lots, where visitors were intrigued by the other characters they would come across on their travels which became part of the allure of the open road.

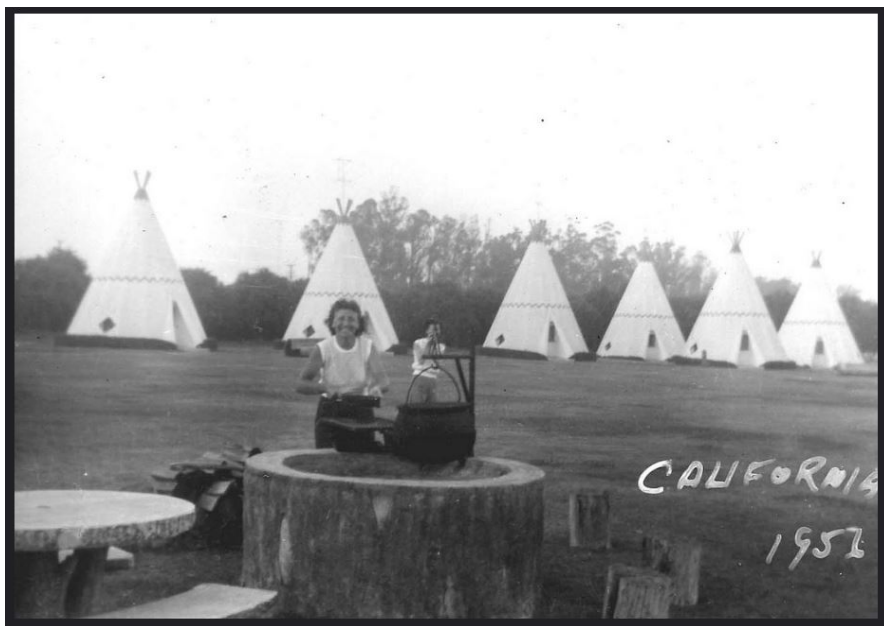


Figure 3.8: Tourists enjoy the shared green space and fire pit camping area at Number 7. Courtesy of Flickr user roadsidequest, <https://flic.kr/p/jdCQPv>.

The interior furnishings prescribed by Frank Redford also suggested a primitive, escapist atmosphere while still keeping up with the tourists changing expectations for a comfortable night's stay. While the outside of the teepee sleeping rooms suggested rugged camping, each unit was insulated and included its own private tiled shower, hot and colder water, sink, electricity and heat, all alluding to the comforts of home. In fact, the personalized bathrooms built into each

individual unit were not introduced in building literature until 1938⁴⁹, three years after Number 1 was constructed. While the cabins were at the cutting edge of motel accommodations, Redford strove to provide visitors with an authentic experience. Genuine Navajo and Apache blankets adorned hickory furniture, complete with bark. Because the tourist would find actual Indian beds unsuitable, Redford furnished each room with “authentic” western furniture. The hickory and cedar furnishings however were not western, as Redford bought the furniture for Numbers 1 and 2 from Columbus Hickory Chair Co. in Columbus, Indiana. The walls of the interior are sheathed in knotty pine wall paneling and create a beveled effect. The hickory furniture and wall paneling, common in western lodges, linked the visitor to this imaginary rustic setting. The Native American themes employed in creating this ‘authentic allusion’ are further discussed in Chapter 4.

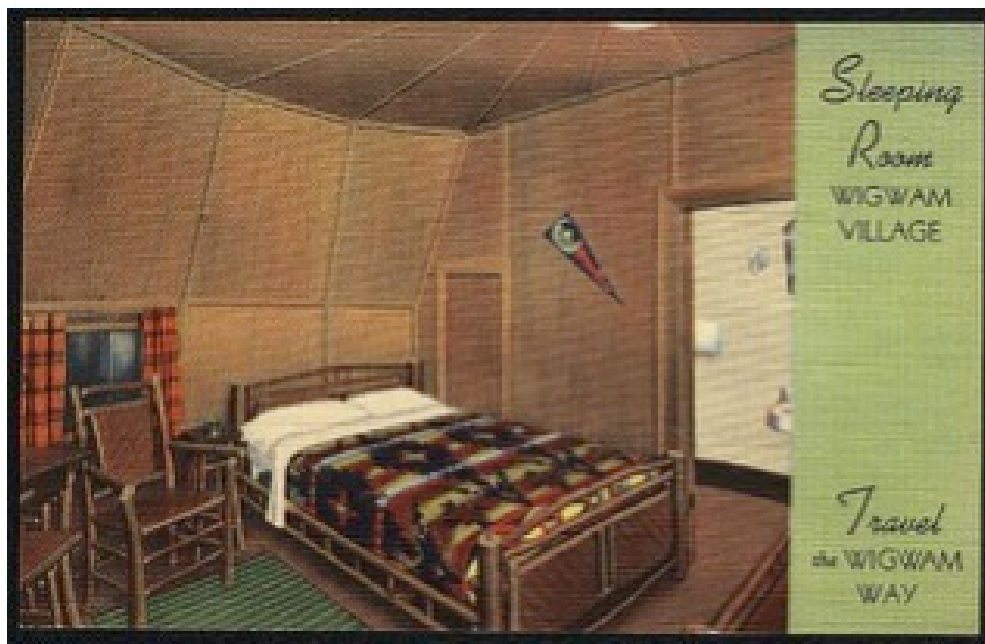


Figure 3.9: The earliest known interior image of Number 1 on a postcard. The back ensures customers that their sleeping rooms are “cool in the summer and warm in the winter”. Figure from *Home Away From Home*, 81.

⁴⁹ Beecher, Mary Anne. "The Motel in Builder's Literature and Architectural Publications." In *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture*, 115-24. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990, 121.

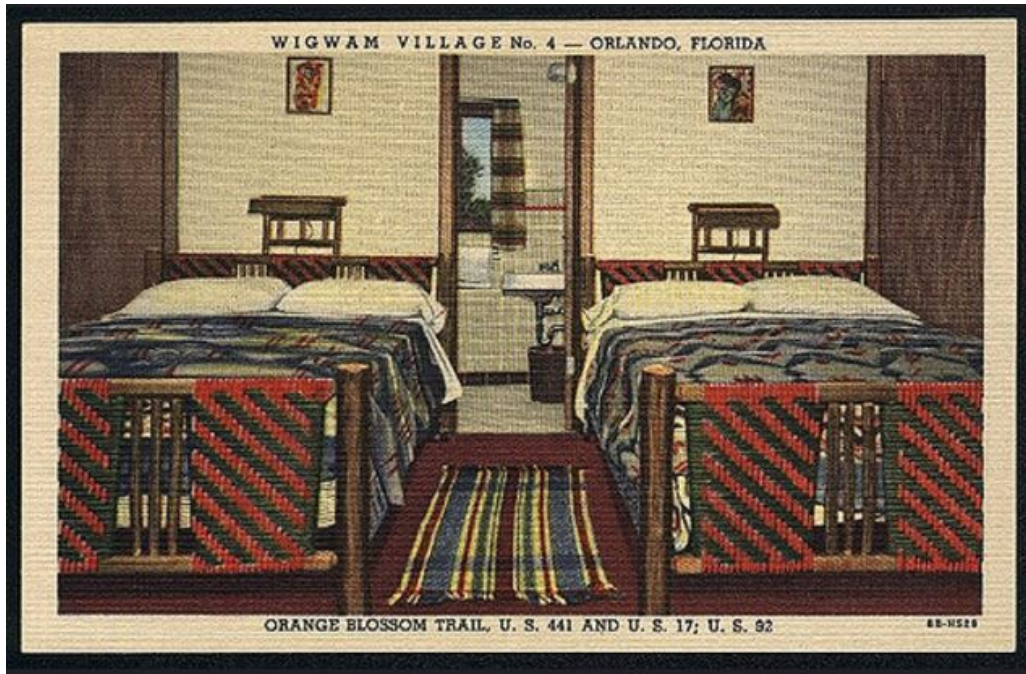


Figure 3.10: This postcard of Number 4 shows the inside of a double sleeping room. The back of the postcard advertises a tile bath, radio, ceiling fan and heater for each unit. Courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58QsG2>.

Frank Redford's patent was a positive and clear-cut step in the direction of modernization. His first patent, in 1936, was after the success of Number 1 and before construction began on Number 2. The patent was a simple drawing of his "new, original, and ornamental Design for a Building."⁵⁰ Eleven years later, Redford updated his patent with a much more detailed description of the Wigwams construction. Redford's intention for securing this patent was to provide "a strong, durable, attractive, sanitary wigwam type construction."⁵¹ The patent only describes the design, building methods and materials of the structures themselves and do not mention their spatial arrangement, their paint treatments, the furnishings nor of other amenities found in all of the Villages such as dining rooms, gift shops or gas stations.

⁵⁰ Redford, Frank A. Design for a Building. US Patent 98,617, filed February 18, 1936.

⁵¹ Ibid.

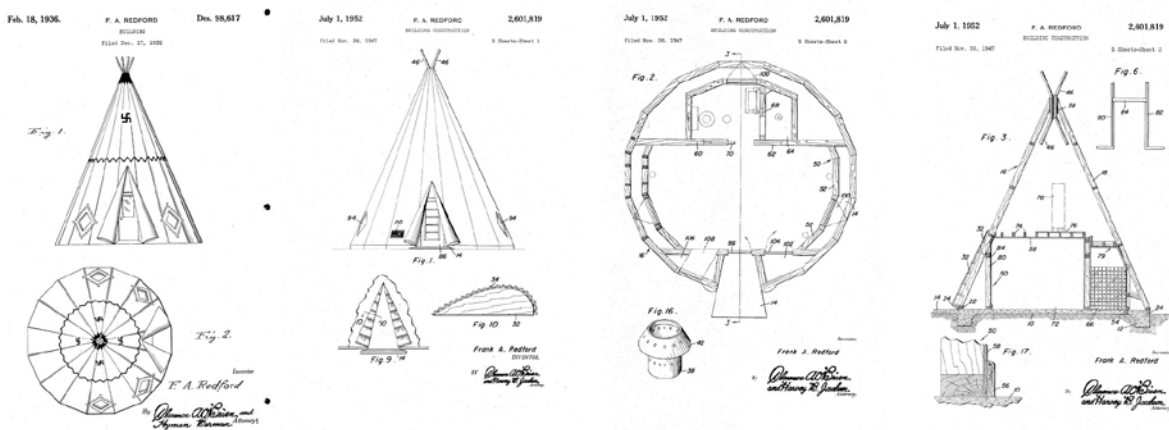


Figure 3.11: The first patent from 1936 appears on the far left. The three images on the right are the updated detailed patent from 1947. Figure U.S. Design Patent 98,617 from February 1936.

Redford's Villages are often referred to as a chain but a majority of them operated as franchises. Since Redford built, owned and operated Numbers 1, 2 and 7, these would be considered a chain. The remaining Numbers 3, 4, 5 and 7 functioned as franchises in that they purchased Redford's design and abided, although informally, by Redford's branding and thematic treatments. Since this was an early stage of franchising, many of the Villages, along with his own, varied in appearance and quality. The growth of the referral and franchise lodging chains grew exponentially in the last half of the twentieth century. By 1962, only 2 percent of all roadside motels were affiliated with referral and franchise chains. A short 25 years later, 64 percent of the country's motels were part of these lodging networks and accounted for 75 percent of the total revenues earned in the entire lodging industry.⁵²

Like many early cottage court owners, Frank Redford was a novice to the field of roadside lodging. Redford's lack of training however influenced his creativity, which ultimately resulted in a business easily distinguished from competitors. His talents clearly lay in the

⁵² Jakle, Sculle, Rogers, *The Motel in America*, 150.

marketing and design of his business and not in finance.⁵³ He did not keep corporate records and reportedly rarely ordered supplies in bulk, instead buying what was needed at the time.⁵⁴ Instead of contractual agreements, Redford relied on personal and informal relationships with the franchise owners. Although Redford called for one half of one percent of the gross business of each Wigwam Village, reports claim that he rarely followed through on this.⁵⁵ Along with royalties, owner of Number 7, Chester Lewis, agreed to pay Redford all of the proceeds from the coin-operated AM radios that would be installed in the motel units at Mr. Lewis' expense.⁵⁶ Redford then profited only modestly and did not care to prosecute on other teepee shaped motels that began to appear in the United States and Canada.

A hallmark of the early motel industry is the business partnership between husband and wife. While Frank Redford was the face of the company, his wife, Vetra, was instrumental in its success. She not only recruited all of the female labor, she designed the uniforms and was in exclusive charge of the lunch room.⁵⁷ In keeping with the customary sexual division of labor, Vetra hired only women for the lunchroom, and men for the gas station. Men were also hired to clean the guest rooms, as having a young woman alone in a motel room might seem unsavory,⁵⁸ Referring to her work on Numbers 1, 2 and 7, Vetra succinctly concluded: "We were always partners."⁵⁹ During World War II the Wigwam Villages followed the contemporary necessity of

⁵³ Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain", 131.

⁵⁴ Keith A. Sculle, "Oral History: A Key to Writing the History of American Roadside Architecture" *Journal of American Culture* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1990), 85.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵⁶ Sara Gredler, Heather Goodson, Chad Moffett, and Emily Pettis, "Wigwam Village No. 7." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Mead & Hunt, Inc., Sacramento, CA, September 28, 2011.

⁵⁷ Claudia R. Brown and Keith A. Sculle, "Wigwam Village No. 2." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Kentucky Heritage Council, Frankfort, February 5, 1988, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Sculle, "Oral History", 85.

shifting gender roles. The manager of Number 1 recalled the scarcity of labor during the War and the female staff stepping up to take overall responsibility for the business. Mrs. Redesill and Mrs. Davidson of Numbers 3 and 5 respectively, reportedly struggled but succeeded in keeping their businesses open when their husbands and other men joined the war effort.⁶⁰

While the physical characteristics of the Villages were very unique in form and concept, many of their qualities mirror the early motel building trends of the time. The evolving motel morphology, shown in Figure 3.12 graphically illustrates change over time in the industry. The auto camp, as discussed previously, only had campsites and sometimes bathrooms. Cabin camps were those sites that originally offered only campsites but later built cabins for a higher charge. The Wigwam Villages most closely resemble the Cottage Court typology in that they were conceived without tented camps sites for auto camping. Except for Number 1, all of the Villages were conceived as a whole from the outset. The term camp was dropped to escape the association of run-down lots full of auto gypsies.⁶¹ Instead the term court was used to suggest enclosure and safety.⁶² The unique teepee building form, called programmatic architecture is discussed in Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 175.

⁶² Ibid.

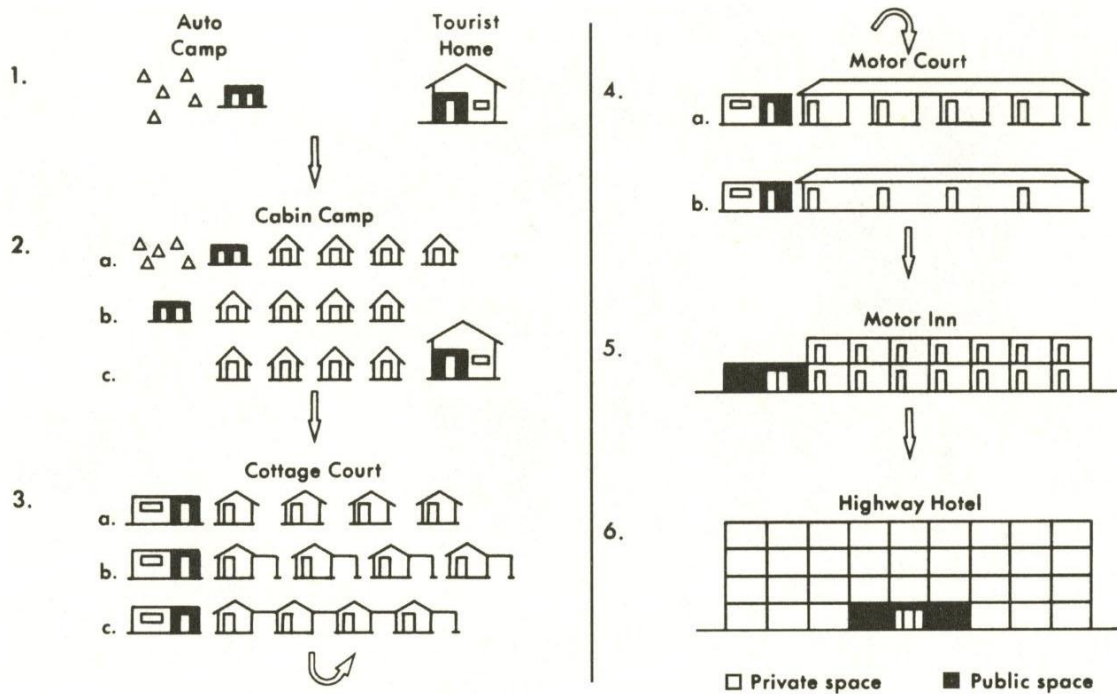


Figure 3.12: The morphology of motel forms as illustrated by John A. Jakle. Figure from *The Motel in America*, 37.

While the Wigwam Villages remain one of the more distinctive early motel chains, their spatial arrangement reflected the strategic motel building of the time. Figure 3.13 demonstrates that all Wigwam Villages were arranged in either a Wide-U or a Crescent. In fact, all of the Villages employed some version of the crescent, except for Village Number 6, in Holbrook, Arizona. This layout maximized road frontage to display the site in full to motorists passing by. This layout was so effective that it was encouraged in design books of the time. Aside from this being a common spatial arrangement, the crescent also helped the programmatic value of the complex by suggesting a Western theme. By organizing the site in a half-circle around grassy

commons and fire pit, visitors are reminiscent of pioneers circling the wagons while on the trail. At almost all of the Wigwams, visitors literally circled their cars next to their Wigwam.⁶³

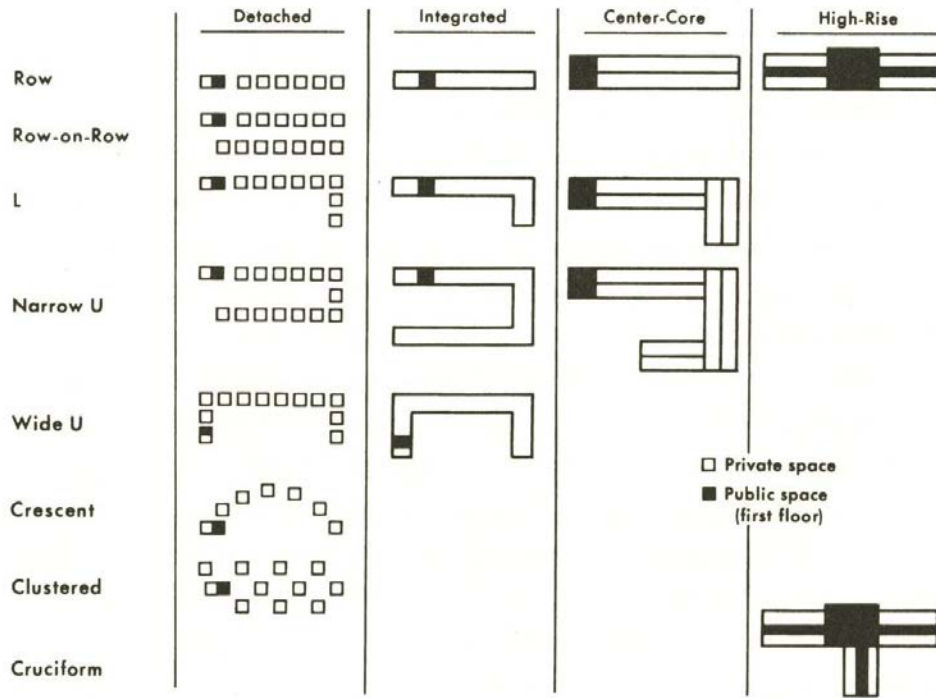


Figure 3.13: Dominant variations in the spatial organizations of motels as illustrated by John A. Jakle. Figure from *The Motel in America*, 37.

To contrast the image of the unsavory hotbed motels made popular in the early days, Frank Redford's Wigwams stressed the importance of both cleanliness and sobriety to all guests.⁶⁴ In Redford's Kentucky Wigwams, the labor force was used to convey this message of wholesomeness. Vera Redford recruited only the "prettiest, freshest, and brightest, and the most intelligent"⁶⁵ young married couples just out of high school. The policy of hiring married

⁶³ Katie Algeo, "Indian for the Night: Sleeping with the "Other" at Wigwam Village Tourist Camps." *Material Culture* 41, no. 2 (October 1, 2009), 11.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

couples ensured the mutual dependence and industry necessary to operate a busy Village. To increase the homogeneity, orderliness and cleanliness of the workers at Numbers 1 and 2, Redford assigned uniforms to both waitresses and gas station attendants. The women restaurant workers were given beige dresses with red decorative rickrack and white aprons and caps. The men working outside were given gray Standard Oil uniforms with caps.⁶⁶ While these uniforms were suggested to franchise owners, only Numbers 3 and 5 were reported to require their workers to dress in a uniform. The uniforms were also a trademark of the brand and assured customers of the reliable product, clean, orderly accommodations.



Figure 3.14: The young, attractive dining room and gas station staff wearing the uniforms that Vetra Redford assigned them. Figure from “Indian for the Night”, 129.

Redford used other ways to express sobriety and cleanliness. At his diners, he designed the kitchen and seating so that all customers could see their food being prepared. This ensured customers, locals and tourists alike, could see that their food was being hygienically prepared.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 129.

While beer was sold in the lunchroom, it was reported that Redford would not tolerate excess nor “misconduct or anything that smacks of indecency.”⁶⁷ Personal interviews done in 1986 recall a story of two customers waiting for dinner talking of their enjoyment of alcohol. Upon hearing their conversation, Redford refused their order.⁶⁸ These rules, a review states “have contributed to the very deserving success he (Redford) is making of the Villages.”⁶⁹ Outside of Kentucky, the Village sites not owned by Redford also maintained strong reputations. While not enforced at all Villages, documentation indicates that Number 5 in Alabama required a marriage license from all couples applying for a room. Furthermore, Village Number 5 also advertised as being for “TRAVELERS ONLY” on the back of their postcard. If enforced strictly, this would prohibit local unmarrieds from using the Wigwams for ‘indecent’ purposes. Number 4 was orderly enough for Mr. and Mrs. Elliott Roosevelt, the son and wife of President Roosevelt, to stay in 1951.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ "Frank Redford's Wigwam Villages on U.S. 31-E and U.S. 31-W." *Glasgow Times* (Glasgow, KY), June 5, 1941.

⁶⁸ Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain", 134.

⁶⁹ "Frank Redford's Wigwam Villages on U.S. 31-E and U.S. 31-W."

⁷⁰ Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain", 130.

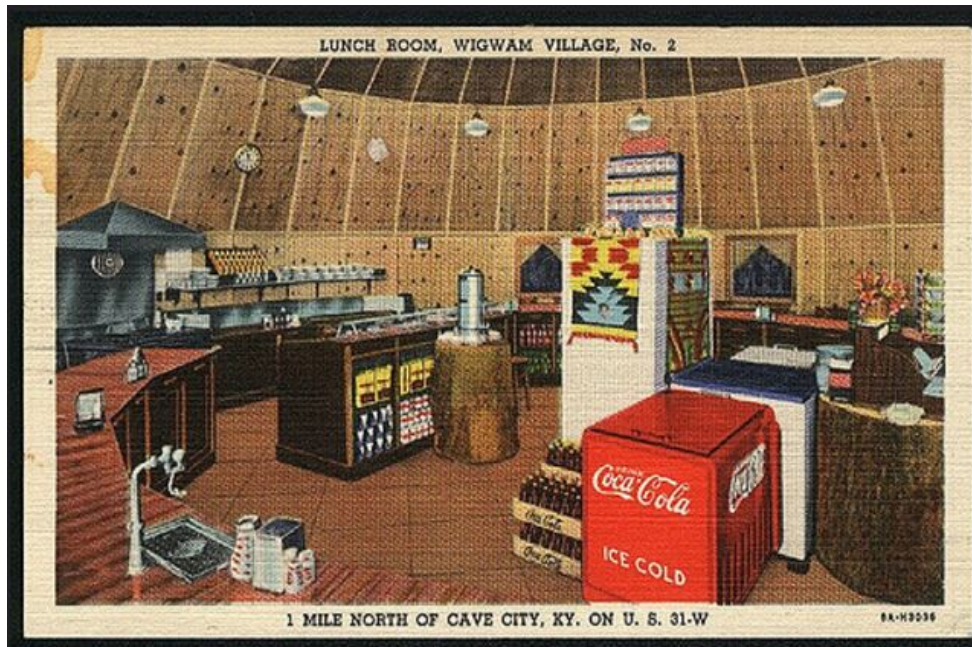


Figure 3.15: Food is openly prepared in Wigwam Number 2's lunchroom, encouraging visitors to associate the brand with cleanliness. Figure from *Home Away From Home*, 81.

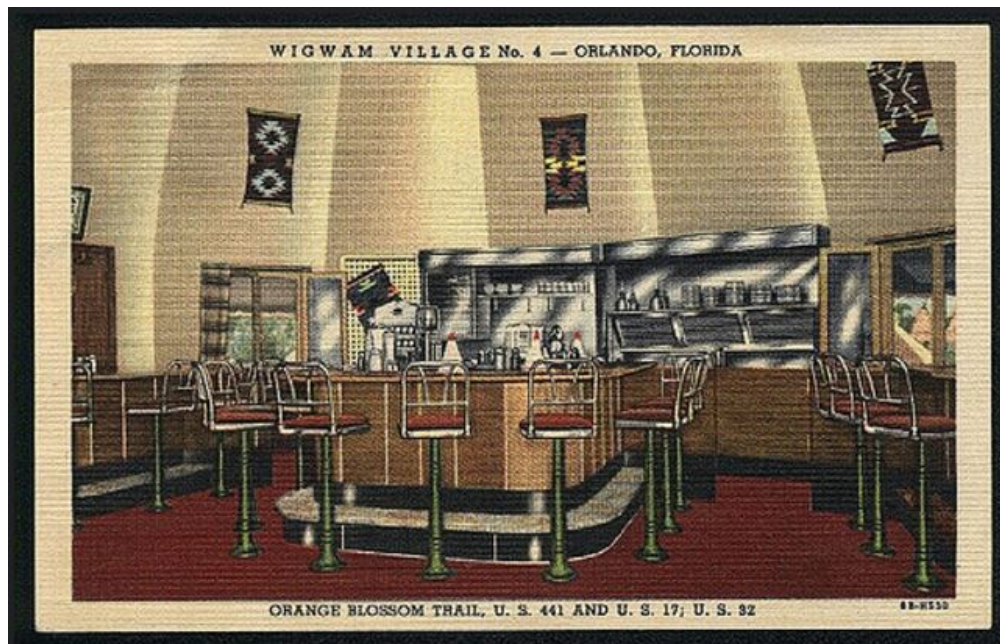


Figure 3.16: Although different in design from earlier Villages, customers in the lunchroom at Number 4 could still see their food being prepared. Courtesy of Flickr user John 4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58QswF>.

Redford's efforts were rewarded in the form of good reviews and repeat customers. The local Kentucky newspaper, *The Glasgow Times*, reported that Numbers 1 and 2 were "models of decency, of cleanliness and of fine service".⁷¹ Duncan Hines, the American pioneer of restaurant and hotel ratings, was an early fan of Redford's business model. From nearby Bowling Green, Hines listed Number 2 in his 1941 *Lodging for a Night*. In the introduction to his popular book, Hines lists the criteria that all of the lodgings in his book meet: (a) cleanliness throughout, (b) quietness, (c) comfortable beds, (d) courteous, adequate and unobtrusive service and (e) hospitality.⁷² The Cave City Wigwam Village is just one of 23 listings for the whole state of Kentucky. It is listed as "15 cottages built to simulate wigwams. Well-kept. Meals."⁷³ Furthermore, the inclusion of the Wigwam Villages in both AAA and the United Motor Courts both reinforced the Villages reputation and guaranteed continued patronage.

As a one of the signs of modernization, the Wigwam Villages were active in the different referral networks of the 1930s and 1940s. The largest nonprofit referral chain, the United Motor Courts, was instrumental in the Wigwam Village chains success. Those listed in their yearly guides were permitted to use the insignia, something that the Wigwam Villages proudly did. Not only did the Villages participate in the organization, they were also host to the annual convention of the Eastern Division of the United Courts in May 1939 at Village Number 2.⁷⁴ The first tourist camp convention ever held in Kentucky, the invitation was sent to court owners east of the Mississippi River. The convention was a step into the modernization era of the roadside with its display of twenty-four different manufacturers of tourist camp supplies, available to owners who wished to provide their guests with the changing expectations of comfort by visitors. The

⁷¹ "Frank Redford's Wigwam Villages on U.S. 31-E and U.S. 31-W."

⁷² Duncan Hines, *Lodging for a night* (Bowling Green, KY: Adventures in good eating, 1941), vi.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷⁴ "Tourist Court Units at Wigwam May 16." *Glasgow Times* (Glasgow, KY), May 4, 1939.

location of the 1939 convention also shows the unique success that the Village had in its ability to draw visitors and be an exemplar of the changing landscape of roadside lodging.



Figure 3.17: Number 5 proudly associates with both the United Motor Courts and AAA. Courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58UGDq>.

The Wigwam Villages' unique building form has considerable value in telling the story of roadside development. The building of such a visually arresting form as the 60-foot tall teepee not only drew unexpected visitors in, but also created an easily recognizable brand. The concept of place-product-packaging was achieved “through the adoption of a readily identifiable logo, color scheme, decorative elements, and building design so that each unit in the chain reinforced the others.”⁷⁵ With the creation of the Wigwam brand through its building form and marketing techniques, Wigwam owners created a list of expectations for visitors who did not want to take their chances at a non-branded motel. By participating in place-product packaging, the Wigwam

⁷⁵ Gredler, Goodson, Moffett, and Pettis, “Wigwam Village No. 7”, 8.

Villages were actively participating in the development underlying the roadside today with the minimal list of approved lodgings to the average consumer.

This chapter first explored the chronological history of the roadside lodging industry followed by the Wigwam Villages own evolution. By looking at the motel's history, from roadside camping to the advent of the modern-day chain and franchise motels, a clear evolution of the industry is apparent. A look at the chronological history of the seven Wigwam Villages helped in creating context along with a clear developmental history of Frank Redford's business. An analysis of the Villages businesses model was undertaken in order to express Redford's methods in building his brand and creating an enjoyable experience for his customers. Many of Redford's efforts mimicked the larger lodging industry's progression into what we see along the roadside today. Because the Wigwam Villages embody this history, they can be considered an archetype of the motel industry in form and development.

CHAPTER 4:
OUTLANDISH ARCHITECTURE, FANTASTICAL IMAGERY
AND THE BUILDING OF A BRAND

This chapter is broken into two parts: the development of advertising linked with architecture in the United States, and the Wigwam Villages' use of this commercial imagery. The first part of this chapter begins with advertising in traditional city centers and expands to the decentralized commercial strips that developed in America to serve the roadside in the 1910s and 1920s. With this new landscape came different ways to advertise through the use of mimetic architectural imagery. The second part of this chapter examines the Wigwam Villages own use of this visually arresting architecture to entice customers and build their recognizable brand. The use of Native American imagery will also be examined as this fits with an early twentieth century national trend of 'selling the Indian'. By first describing the context of the architectural climate of early roadside America, the Wigwam Villages fit comfortably as an archetype of this era and thus bear value.

The growth of commercial architecture was nowhere more unique and varied in its manifestations than in the United States.⁷⁶ From the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, American commercial activity was almost exclusively centered in densely configured Main Streets. These business centers were largely a collection of one or two-story buildings with

⁷⁶ Richard W. Longstreth, *The buildings of main street: a guide to American commercial architecture* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987), 12.

shared party walls, situated on rectangular lots, most often much deeper than they were wide.⁷⁷ Because of this arrangement, the only component of the business seen by pedestrians was the facade. Although the facade is only a small part of the building's fabric, in these commercial centers, its job was to advertise the business within. Thus, between the early nineteenth and the early-twentieth century, commercial structures were designed to place all ornament on the front, in an attempt to make the exterior facade as alluring as possible.

Business owners advertised their goods using only the architectural details on their facades such as alluring signs and storefront window displays. Because their businesses were to be seen on a small pedestrian scale, much of the advertising took place in the front windows and could involve small, more descriptive text for passerby. As commercial centers grew and became more densely packed with competing businesses, "signs covered windows and spandrels, blanketed exposed walls, projected out from building facades, and jutted up from roofs high above the cornice line."⁷⁸ The introduction of the common automobile in the 1910s and 1920s made these signs even larger, vying for the attention of potential customers traveling at higher speeds.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁸ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American roadside architecture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 41.



Figure 4.1: Detroit in 1905, shows the competing advertisements for various businesses. Figure from *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 42.

The introduction of the automobile encouraged the linear, horizontal spread of the American landscape. This opening-up of the land created new commercial structures and endless possibilities in advertising potential. Before the automobile, very rarely were commercial structures conceived as freestanding, seen by customers from all sides.⁷⁹ While business owners in the older commercial centers were largely restricted to their storefronts, the businesses located in the decentralized commercial strips were not. Nor were these businesses restricted by adherence to an already established architectural style. As there were no building traditions on the new American roadside, there was no aesthetic basis to frame new structures within. This freedom gave roadside business owners a blank canvas to be as fantastical and creative as they chose.

⁷⁹ Longstreth, *The buildings of main street*, 16.

While roadside businesses had free reign over their architectural styles, they did have to consider something that Main Street business owners rarely had to; a fast-moving consumer base. Thus, business owners had to successfully create a merger between building and sign. The solution to this problem is what Liebs describes as “architecture for speed reading.”⁸⁰ In this new genre of architecture, a building’s form itself acted as a direct form of advertisement. In the introduction to *California Crazy; Roadside Vernacular Architecture*, David Gebhard implies that audiences are asked not to respond to the buildings form, but instead to the programmatic utterance lying behind the form.⁸¹ A building that employed direct symbolism would take on a form that directly reflected the buildings purpose such as a shoe repair shop in the shape of a shoe or a film developing business in the shape of a camera. Other mimetic architecture did not convey what services could be found inside but were simply eye catching such as an ice cream shop in the shape of a smoking bull dog or a bar in the shape of a trout (although this could imply this is where customers go to ‘drink like a fish’). Lastly, buildings could be built to merely reflect the name of the business, important in building a recognizable brand. In these instances, written signage works to tie the form and name together.

⁸⁰ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 41.

⁸¹ Jim Heimann and Rip Georges. *California crazy: roadside vernacular architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1980), 5.



Figure 4.2: The Shutter shack, Westminster, California, built 1938, applies direct symbolism. Figure from *California Crazy*, 19.



Figure 4.3: The Campground Tavern, built 1932 applies indirect symbolism to passerby. Figure from *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 186.



Figure 4.4: Sphinx Realty, built in 1926 in Los Angeles is an example of a mimetic building whose sole purpose is to create a lasting visual brand. Figure from *California Crazy*, 96.

Although not considered mimetic, the use of past architectural styles, devoid of their geographical traditions, were used to catch the motorist's eye and to establish a brand. By stimulating associations with places other than home, businesses capitalized on the American imagination of place and the resulting predictable associations⁸². Stereotypes from dime novels, movies, advertising and Wild West Shows flavored how businesses captured tourists and passerby. Aside from their ability to be visually capturing, popular images also had the potential to be culturally symbolic. Colonialism was one such motif, associated with New England, nostalgia and the wholehearted endorsement of elite culture.⁸³ The rustic was another theme that was associated with the resourceful frontier era and the simple life. By tempting tourists with

⁸² Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 51.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 53.

these stereotypes, businesses owners of the early roadside left behind a curious mix of plantations, log cabins and teepees.



Figure 4.5: This San Diego diner was built in 1931 and confronts visitors with rustic, frontier charm. Figure from *California Crazy*, 103.

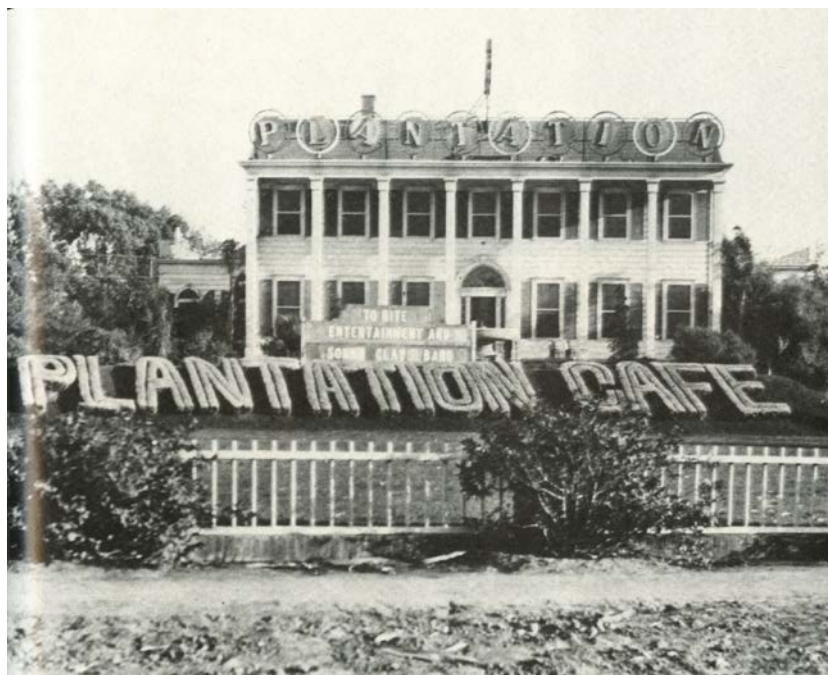


Figure 4.6: The Plantation Cafe in Culver City, California was built in 1926. Figure from *California Crazy*, 107.

Not only did business owners need to make their buildings visible from the road and at high speeds; they also needed to encourage the split-second decision to stop. To do this, businesses chose designs that were based on popular images, already embedded in the American traveler's mind. Due to the increased usage of this new kind of roadside commercial imagery, the 1920s and 1930s is dubbed the golden age of the roadside.⁸⁴ Nowhere did this new commercial architecture gain such traction than in Southern California. This architecture flourished freely in Southern California because of the area's early dependence and development surrounding the automobile, the mildness in climate, and the resulting ability to erect structures quickly and cheaply.⁸⁵ By 1935, this area had a reputation for this kitschy style, as referenced in a 1935 article "anything haywire is always most haywire in California."⁸⁶

Primitive or indigenous architecture was a reoccurring theme in the Programmatic architecture of the 1920s and 1930s⁸⁷. Dime store novels and increasingly the movie industry created a romantic landscape for the increasingly industrialized American populace. In the early-to-mid-twentieth century, gas, food and lodging, predominately owned by non-Natives, used Native iconography and turned the North American Indian into an icon of consumer society.⁸⁸ When the car replaced the train as the preferred mode of travel, it created a symbolic focus not on the future but on the past⁸⁹. Unlike train travel, cars created driver independence and privacy reminiscent of the stagecoach. During the stagecoach days, travelers could determine their start

⁸⁴ Heimann and Georges, *California Crazy*, 19.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁶ "Palaces of the Hot Doges." *Architectural Forum* 63 (August 1935): 30-31.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁸ Peter Glaser, "The Convenient Indian-Part I", *Society for Commercial Archaeology Journal*, (Fall 2013), 32.

⁸⁹ Lisa Mahar-Keplinger, *American signs: form and meaning on Route 66* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2002) 16.

times, what their route would be and who they would travel with. This type of independence was largely replaced with the railroad's rigid time schedules and cramped quarters. Western themes symbolized American freedom. This was not lost on roadside entrepreneurs who incorporated these themes into their business' form. The Wild West theme appealed to both adults and children, making it an appropriate motif for roadside businesses catering to families on vacation.



Figure 4.7: A gas station in Allentown, Arizona along I-40 creates a geographically-displaced Western fantasy for tourists. Figure from *The End of the Road*, 121.



Figure 4.8: An abandoned souvenir stand in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Figure from *The End of the Road*, 119.

Programmatic architecture was widely condemned by professional planners for the blatant commercialism and the destruction of the City Beautiful orderliness of cities. The thematic treatment of buildings took away from the architectural traditions which tie a landscape to place. Referring to an Indiana building in the shape of a milk bottle, an author for *The Architect and Engineer* could “hear the art-loving architects unanimous groan of disapproval come gurgling down...like sour milk running from a huge bottle.”⁹⁰ In 1927, architect Robert H. Orr first bemoaned the roadside billboard before warning readers of an even greater threat, sculptural advertising. If our sculptural monuments are conceived to advertise gasoline, cafes, theatres and hotels, Orr wondered “how far this kind of objectionable advertising and debasing of art may be carried.”⁹¹ If commercial structures continue to be built in a mimetic form, Orr

⁹⁰ "Milk-Bottle Architecture." *The Architect and Engineer* (January 1914) 113.

⁹¹ Robert H. Orr, "Sculptural Advertising." *The Architect and Engineer* (October 1927) 54.

worried that the real objects of art, except by those trained, will be disassociated and lost with time.

It was not until the last half of the twentieth century that commercial architecture appreciation from professionals was well documented. Architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown were proponents of this type of architecture. In 1972, the duo released their controversial book *Learning from Las Vegas*, which was revolutionary in looking at the visual expression of vernacular commercial structures. Using a trained eye, Venturi and Brown found the necessary antidote for the sterility they perceived in high-style Modern architecture.⁹² In the book, Venturi and Brown introduce the dichotomy of buildings as “ducks” or “decorated sheds”. A building that is a duck is one “where the architectural systems of space, structure and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form.”⁹³ On the other hand, a building that is designed as a decorated shed is one “where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently.”⁹⁴ The duck typology is named after an actual business in Long Island in the shape of a duck, built to house a shop selling ducks and duck eggs. This duck store is a sculptural symbol and architectural shelter or simply, the building is the sign. Thus, a duck uses its form to explicitly tell those outside what they can find inside. Decorated sheds reference generic structures with added signs that denote their purpose. Where other architects and professionals saw a landscape of kitsch and architectural non-traditions, Venturi and Scott Brown marveled at the layers of symbolism present along these commercial strips.

⁹² Keith A. Sculle, "Oral History: A Key to Writing the History of American Roadside Architecture" *Journal of American Culture* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1990), 79.

⁹³ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), 89.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

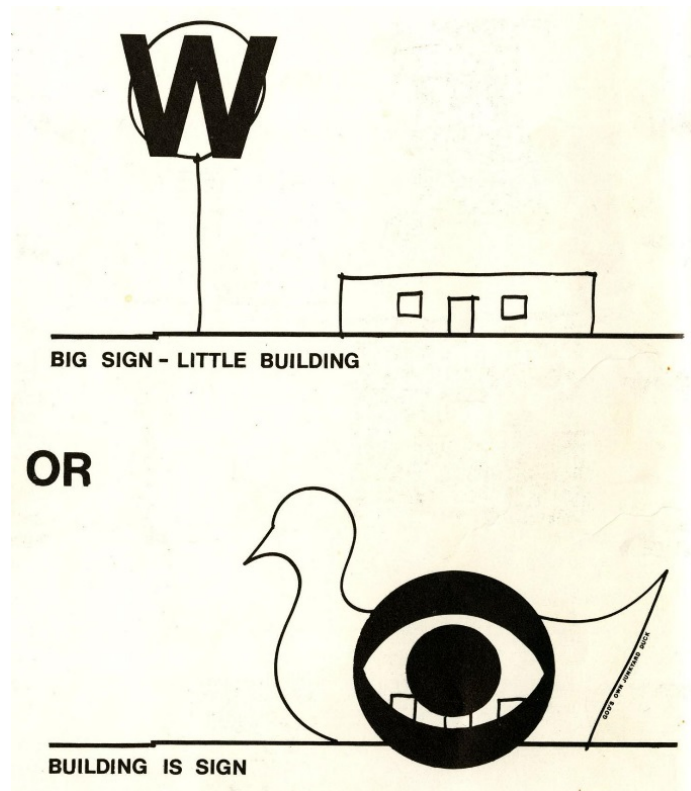


Figure 4.9: Venturi and Scott Brown identified the two different types of commercial structures along the new commercial corridors. Figure from *Learning from Las Vegas*, 89.

Wartime rationing followed by the economic boom of the late 1940s brought about many changes to the architectural styles found on the roadside. Modern and exaggerated modern themes took the place of Venturi's duck as the modern harkened progress and a look towards the future. Also called Post-War Modern, this architecture employed glass and steel and heavily relied on strong geometric shapes. The roadside was no longer a truly vernacular landscape as more and more businesses began to employ professional architects and advertisers to design their buildings to stand out. The buildings along commercial strips were still built to be advertisements, but this time employed a workable formula of approved shapes and materials.

In the trade journal *Motor Courts and Drive-Ins: Construction and Operation*, Herbert Smith announced “the era of concrete dogs and oranges is fortunately on the wane.”⁹⁵ By the 1950s, the “fervor and zeal of the free-enterprise system so sumptuously and joyously expressed in commercial design”⁹⁶ was over.

The Wigwam Villages

The Wigwam Villages are an illustrative archetype of this early roadside architectural imagery that thrived before World War II. Every Village location is outside of a large city and all are situated on a popular commercial strip. Keeping in the roadside tradition, the Wigwams utilized the lack of size and style restrictions to build their eye-catching structures. With no large buildings blocking their view, the Wigwam’s novelty architecture could be seen from all directions unlike the commercial areas of America’s older towns. All of the Wigwams were also situated in newly popular tourist areas. The first two Wigwams were built when the Mammoth Cave region was authorized as a national park, which created new recreational opportunities and thus a new tourist clientele. Similarly, the other sites were built in burgeoning tourist zones in New Orleans, Orlando, Birmingham, Holbrook and San Bernardino. Villages were built to accommodate tourists who could now explore the country for the first time by road. These tourists were no doubt caught off guard by the arresting 60-foot tall teepee buildings, seen in Figure 4.10.

⁹⁵ Herbert Smith . "An Architect's Notes on Designing Drive-Ins." In *Motor Courts and Drive-Ins Construction and Operation*, Vol. 1. (New York, NY: Ahrens, 1951. Accessed November 11, 2016) 94.

⁹⁶ John Margolies. *Pump and circumstance: glory days of the gas station* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 79.



Figure 4.10: An early dashboard view of Number 6. One can imagine the draw these curious structures had on unsuspecting drivers. Courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58QwrD>.

Keeping with the tradition, the Wigwams have their roots in Southern California, the programmatic architectural mecca. Multiple sources claim Frank Redford got his idea from a teepee shaped ice cream business in Long Beach, just south of Los Angeles. Redford's borrowing of this mimetic design marked the relatively rare occurrence of this type of architecture outside of Southern California. Less rare however is Redford's use of the teepee design motif for his business. Across the country, and especially in the Southwest, this style took a strong hold in the early days of the roadside.

The Villages are a classic example of Venturi and Brown's "duck" metaphor. While the Villages all have some form of a large, often lit up sign bearing their name, the buildings form is really the sign. Since the Wigwam Villages are a form of programmatic architecture, it is not clear whether they represent direct or indirect symbolization. On first glance, the association of teepees as homes and the Wigwams function as a place of shelter would suggest direct

symbolism. Passengers looking for a temporary home saw the symbol of Native American domesticity as a welcoming place to sleep for the night. However in reality Frank Redford first designed his business to be only a cafe and gas station, only building sleeping accommodations two years after his business became a success. The use of the teepee motif since the Villages inception would then suggest that Frank Redford was just merely adopting an eye-catching design that he saw in his travels. This design doubled in its significance because not only was it large and dominant within the roadside landscape, it also connected the name of the business, although erroneously, to the architectural form. Much like the large Sphinx head in Figure 4.4, the Wigwams formed a direct correlation between architectural form and business brand.



Figure 4.11: Approaching motorists link the architecture with the Wigwam Village chain in the neon sign at Number 2. Courtesy of Flickr user Kelly Ludwig, <https://flic.kr/p/5vvH6z>.

Construction of programmatic and mimetic buildings declined after World War II. This California tradition of dazzling motorists and creating fanciful commercial strips seemed to be

coming to an end. In place of fanciful designs, building literature praised the cleanliness and practicality of the streamline moderne. The building of Wigwam Number 7 in San Bernardino along with a few others however, proved that the tradition was not completely dead.⁹⁷ While there are still mimetic buildings scattered sparsely in Southern California and other states, no other franchised business has persisted in bringing symbolism and kitsch continuously to the American roadside.

Besides attracting customers traveling at high speeds, novelty architecture is also a valuable tool at creating and establishing a brand. Because the Village's structures were so unique and identifiable, the design was worked into almost every advertisement, promotion or souvenir. Matchbooks, handbills and postcards prominently featured the teepee structures both in form and their trademark spatial arrangement. Souvenirs that furthered the teepee motif were sold at some Villages but not at others. Miniature ceramic teepees, supplied by Redford, were sold at Number 5. Teepee shaped napkins were served at Number 5 along with teepee shapes dining room menus, which were also used at Number 1 and Number 2. Redford also supplied Number 6 with a mold to make teepee ashtrays and lamps with a teepee base. Paul Young, the owner after Redford sold his two Kentucky Villages, was a traveling salesman of advertising novelties and is said to have been the only other owner who rivaled Redford's creativity in marketing.⁹⁸ This creative tradition has carried on today as visitors can purchase such novelty items with the teepee branding. Available in the operating Villages, customers can buy Christmas teepee ornaments, shirts, playing cards, ashtrays and pins.

⁹⁷ Heimann and Georges, *California Crazy*, 23.

⁹⁸ Keith A. Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain: A Link in the Modernization of the American Roadside." In *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture*, ed. Jan Jennings (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 131.

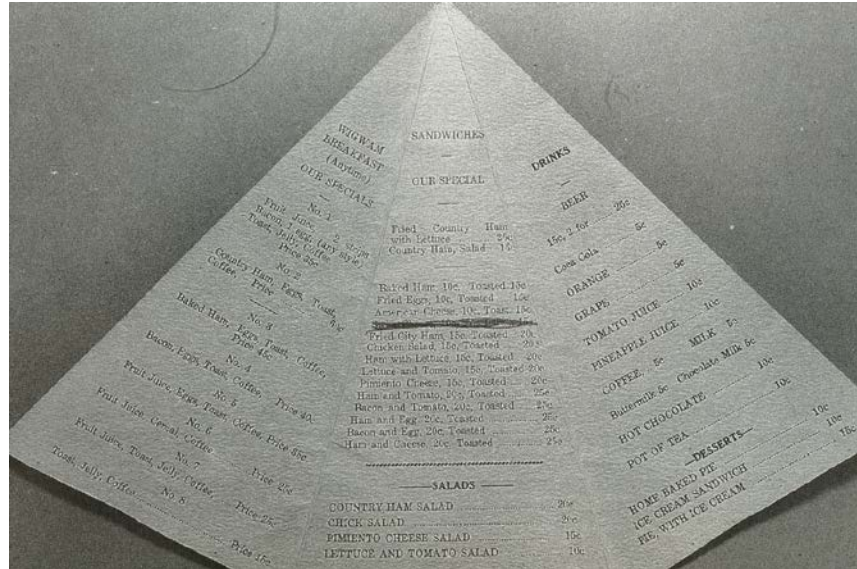


Figure 4.12: The teepee shaped menu at Number 1. Figure from “Frank Redford’s Wigwam Village Chain”, 127.

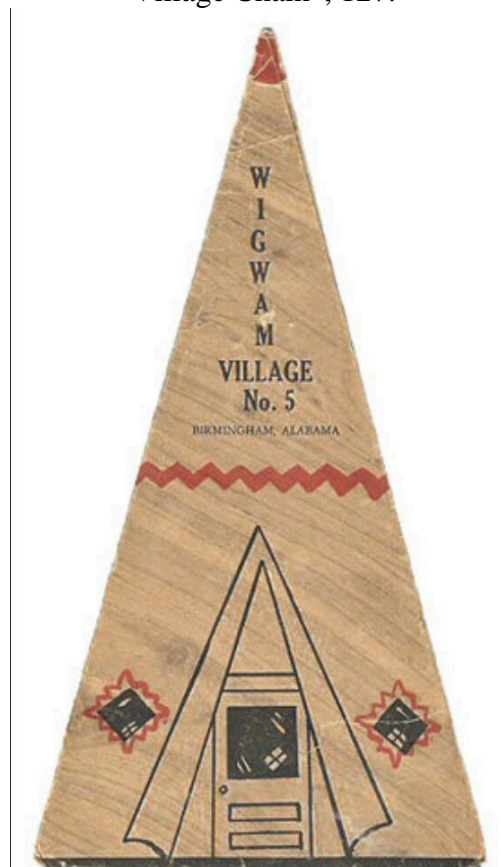


Figure 4.13: The outside of the teepee shaped menu at Number 5. Figure from the Wigwam Motel, Number 7’s Facebook Page.

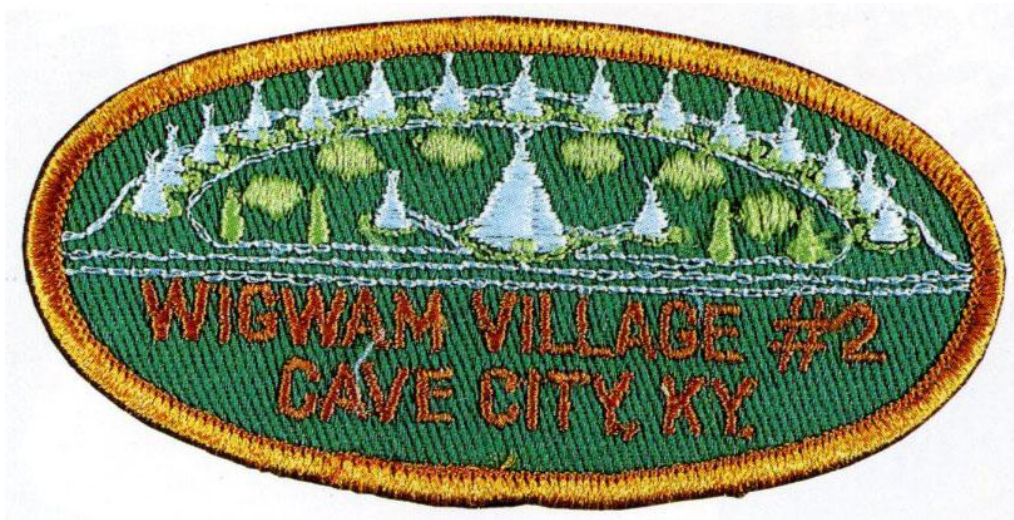


Figure 4.14: A souvenir patch from Number 2. Figure from *Home Away From Home*, 78.

As shown above in the example of the log cabin business in San Diego, the primitive was often used for nostalgia by the populace with desires to return to these ‘simpler’ times. The theme with the widest appeal was the Plains Indian teepee because of its implied connection with the romance and adventure of the American West. The Wigwam Villages were conceived of this idealism in both their form and their service. As noted in Chapter 3, all early staffers at various Villages were required to wear their Native American themed uniforms. While service in the dining room was no doubt a modern, American dining experience, an early newspaper insisted the encounter was anything but; “The lunch counters are arranged in a circle and the customers are served as tribesmen of olden days.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ "Cave City Section." *Glasgow Times* (Glasgow, KY), December 8, 1938.



Figure 4.15: “Redford grasped architecture as the remedy for his customer’s modern need for personal communication in escapist surroundings.” Redford often dressed up in Native American patterns, seen above with his Seminole print sweater. Figure from *Home Away From Home*, 81.



Figure 4.16: Vetra sporting one of her “authentic” uniforms. Figure from *Home Away From Home*, 80.

Redford furthered the illusion that the Villages were staffed by an authentic staff by hiring Native Americans at Number 1 and 2. Oral records mention that three Indian boys were employed at Wigwam Number 1 before World War II.¹⁰⁰ One such employee at Number 1, Chief Eagle, managed the service station and garage at Number 1. Along with his duties he was also used for promotional opportunities, such as appearances at local Rotary clubs.¹⁰¹ Along with their ethnicity, Redford promoted his employees Indianness by dressing them in “authentic” headdress, as seen in Figure 4.17. Also at Number 1, Indian dancers from Oklahoma were brought down to perform for special occasions in the green shared space encircled by the cabins.¹⁰² One such occasion was the United Motor Court conference, discussed in Chapter 3.



Figure 4.17: Isaac Ross stands in front of Number 1’s trading post. Figure from “Frank Redford’s Wigwam Village Chain”, 127.

¹⁰⁰ Sculle, "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain", 128.

¹⁰¹ "Chief Eagle to be guest of the Rotary Club to-day." *Glasgow Times* (Glasgow, KY), August 9, 1934.

¹⁰² "Tourist Court Units at Wigwam May 16."

The Village gift shop also promoted the authenticity of the Villages. A 1934 news article speaks of the Trading Post before it was built. Redford had acquired an “extensive collection of Indian relics to be housed in a special building (the Trading Post), and placed in charge of by an Indian boy.”¹⁰³ Perhaps originally built to showcase these artifacts, the Trading Post eventually sold Indian souvenirs. The four-sided wooden stand Trading Posts were only found at Number 1 and 2, perhaps indicating Redford’s dedication to creating an authentically primitive atmosphere for his guests. Even though no stands exist today, each Village still operates a gift shop where one can buy either branded Wigwam products or, in keeping with tradition, “authentic” Indian objects.

Redford clearly understood that such eye-catching architecture was necessary in capturing motoring tourists. If we are to believe that the Wigwams were not conceived to have direct symbolic intent, then what kind of associations did the early tourists glean from the teepee shapes? We have already determined that the original message of the Wigwam Villages was not direct symbolism. It would not become direct until its later manifestation as a place of shelter, with the addition of the sleeping rooms. At this time, the associations of home and a place to sleep for the night could be gleaned from passerby.

Western dime novels and increasingly the movie industry drove these romantic notions of the West and the Indian. These popular mediums centered around three main types of characters: “(1) the agents of civilization, such as townspeople, settlers... (2) the outlaws or the Indians, and (3) the hero, who frequently represents some blend of both sides.”¹⁰⁴ Guests of the Wigwam Villages embody that of the hero of their favorite fantasy story. Traveling in their cars with no

¹⁰³ "Collection of Indian relics to be displayed at Wigwams." *Glasgow Times* (Glasgow, KY), June 7, 1934.

¹⁰⁴ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The white man's Indian: images of the American Indian from Columbus to the present* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 97.

set schedules, they travel the country both as nomadic Indians and as civilized Americans with modern standards. The tourist then “is hunter (of novel experiences), trader (for souvenirs), explorer (of highways and byways), and (road) warrior.”¹⁰⁵ The tourist’s occupation of the Wigwam shelters is then a symbolic act of colonization.

The Villages’ reliance on Native American imagery closely reflects the thematic treatment of motels at the time. Most of this imagery however had more in common with Midwestern Indian tribal customs, where none of the seven Villages were located. The Villages interchangeable use of Native American themes only further aligns Americans into accepting all Native American cultures as one. Pan-American identity is one “which both subsumes tribal differences and geographically displaces cultural elements.”¹⁰⁶ By using this Pan-American identity, the Villages borrow different building traditions and spatial arrangements as they saw commercially fit.

True Native American architecture is one influenced by economic, ecological, social, technological, historical and religious forces.¹⁰⁷ These different circumstances determine the materials, form and use of Native American structures and vary wildly from tribe to tribe. A double geographic displacement is in effect at the Wigwam Villages, one of architecture and one of nomenclature.¹⁰⁸ To call the structures ‘wigwams’ is a misnomer. Their conical shape would suggest the name teepee but would still not be representative of any true Native American cultural identity. A true teepee (or tipi) is one found by tribes in the temperate Plains region, far from any of the Village locations. Teepees provide a quickly assembled and easily dismantled

¹⁰⁵ Katie Algeo, "Indian for the Night: Sleeping with the "Other" at Wigwam Village Tourist Camps." *Material Culture* 41, no. 2 (October 1, 2009), 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton, *Native American architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 11.

¹⁰⁸ Algeo, “Indian for a Night”, 8.

shelter for both sweltering and freezing weather.¹⁰⁹ The materials necessary in building a Plains teepee are wood poles, stakes, pins, hide covers and ropes.¹¹⁰ Besides the point that their shape resembles a teepee, the name Wigwam also aids in spreading the stereotype that Native American terms and architecture are interchangeable.

No traveler would mistake Redford's design as authentically Native American. Writing for *Material Culture*, Katie Algeo argues that visitors of the Villages are not searching for a truly authentic Native American encounter. Instead, they seek out American authenticity, for the appeal of the Wigwam Villages is that they represent the real America.¹¹¹ Historically, Native Americans were constructed to be the "Other", something to be compared against the white, wealthy and middle classes. Throughout Europeans contact, an active process of turning Native Americans into our opposite takes place, a symbolic yardstick in which we are to compare ourselves. Whether the guest's encounter with Native American themes was about Indians as symbols for the West or about Indians as the exotic "Other", a visit to the Wigwam Villages no doubt is about "us", the white Euro American as a reference.¹¹² Thus, visitors to the Villages do not search for and receive an authentic Native American experience but instead an authentic American encounter.

This chapter explored the aesthetic treatments of the early roadside followed by the Wigwam Villages own treatments in building their brand. By first looking at the progression from late nineteenth century building advertising in city centers through to mimetic architecture of the 1920s and 1930s to finally the streamlined and modern treatments in the post-World War

¹⁰⁹ Nabokov, *Native American Architecture*, 153.

¹¹⁰ Algeo, "Indian for a Night", 8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

II days, a clear evolution is obvious. Fitting into this story of roadside thematic treatments is the Wigwam Village. Along with fitting into this kitsch building tradition, the Wigwam Village also used their buildings forms to reflect both their brand and Native American symbolism. By using a Native American theme, the Wigwam Villages join in the American tradition of creating a Pan-American Indian available for consumption. The Wigwam Villages adherence to symbolism and branding strategies then makes them a valuable extant piece of the roadside story.

CHAPTER 5:

AMERICAN INSTITUTION: THE VILLAGES ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER

This chapter will discuss the present-day conditions of the three extant Villages: Number 2 in Cave City, Kentucky, Number 6 in Holbrook, Arizona and Number 7 in San Bernardino, California. As all three have been placed in the National Register of Historic Places, an analysis of their nomination forms will be conducted. This chapter will then utilize the Department of the Interior's Seven Aspects of Integrity to assess the present-day conditions of the sites. While all extant Villages are still largely unchanged, their alterations over time are revealing to their adaptability to their changing environs. By revealing these modifications, the Wigwam Villages are even more a part of the history of the roadside. By evaluating both their present-day integrity and their nomination forms, suggestions can be made on how to fully represent each site today. Before approaching these two aspects, a quick introduction to both topics will be conducted.

The National Register of Historic Places was established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Register is the official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed significant and worthy of preservation. Listing on the National Register is mostly honorific. A successful listing does not ensure any particular protection, as the sites are still private properties, at the whim of owners. However, while listing cannot protect a property, there are still many benefits to pursuing designation. A number of federal tax incentives and grants are offered to properties listed on the Register. Studies have indicated that historic

designation increases property values and positively contributes to a community.¹¹³ Aside from financial incentives, individual home owners may glean status or prestige when their residences are listed on the register. While businesses owners may receive these same intangible rewards, they may also find that a listing can be economically profitable. Among businesses who capitalize on bringing tourists in, such a listing can be used as a marketing tool, as seen in Figure 5.1. With this sign, visitors feel like they are part of history and thus, getting their money's worth while staying at Village Number 6.

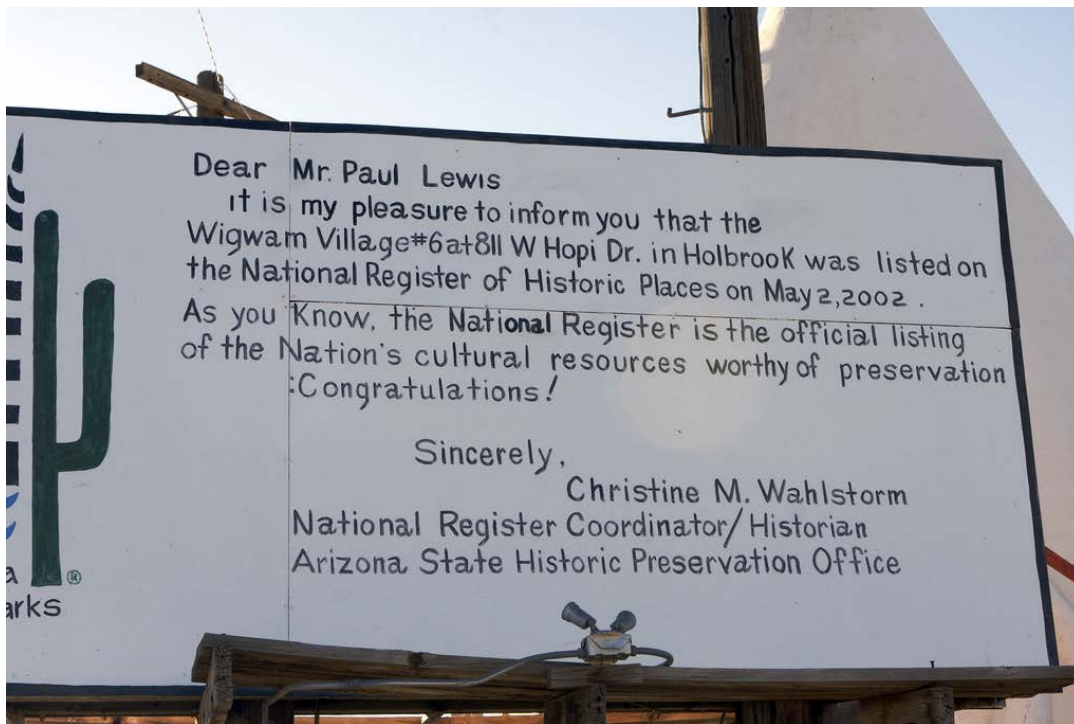


Figure 5.1: The hand painted replica that hangs proudly at Village Number 6. Courtesy of Flickr user Kelly Ludwig, <https://flic.kr/p/a1NVF1>.

For a property to be eligible to be listed on the National Register, it must first meet at least one of the four criteria of significance. Many properties qualify and meet more than one criteria. The criteria are as follows:

¹¹³ Donovan D. Rykema, *The economics of historic preservation: a community leader's guide* (Washington, D.C.: PlaceEconomics, 2014), 12.

- ✓ Criterion A, Event, the property is significant because of its association to an important event in American history.
- ✓ Criterion B, Person, the property is significant because of its association with an important person. This usually does not include birth or death places, as listed in the Register's exclusions.
- ✓ Criterion C, Design or Construction, the property is significant because of its distinctive characteristics, its great artistic value or being the work of a master architect.
- ✓ Criterion D, Information Potential, the property is significant because of its potential to yield information important to history or prehistory¹¹⁴.

A successful nomination will also meet the Department of the Interior's Seven Aspects of Integrity. All sites are ascribed a period of significance. Site conditions of this period or year are the basis in assessing the integrity of present day conditions. The Department of the Interior's Seven Aspects of Integrity are as follows:

1. Location –whether the property has been moved or relocated since its construction
2. Design – the composition of elements that constitute the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.
3. Setting – the physical environment of a historic property that illustrates the character of the place.
4. Materials – the physical elements combined in a particular pattern or configuration to form the aid during a period in the past.

¹¹⁴ United States. Department of the Interior. National Park Service. *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. Vol. 15. 1990. 11.

5. Workmanship – the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period of history. Workmanship furnishes evidence of the technology of the craft.
6. Feeling – the quality that a historic property has in evoking the aesthetic or historic sense of a past period of time.
7. Association – the direct link between a property and the event or person for which the property is significant.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 23.

Name of Property: Wigwam Village No. 2 (for more information, see APPENDIX A)

This is the only Wigwam Village that is listed as a district. This is peculiar as Village No. 2 was originally and is still today owned by one person, as one business. Using the *Guidelines for Completing National Register of Historic Places Forms*, published by the U.S. Department of the Interior, a district “possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development.”¹¹⁶ Common usage of the district classification applies to neighborhoods, villages and campuses. Since Village No. 2 was originally conceived and still exists as one business with one purpose, referring to it as a district is a misnomer. Instead, the buildings classification would more accurately reflect the nature of the Village. A building, according to the *Guidelines*, is any building or buildings that are “created principally to shelter any form of human activity.”¹¹⁷ Since the function of Village No. 2 is to cater to and house customers, a building criteria would be more accurate.

The Criteria for Village No. 2 is listed as A: Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history and C: Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. Both A and C are appropriate designations for Village No. 2. The Areas of Significance are listed as Transportation and Architecture which are adequately described in the Statement of Significance. Additional categories could be added to expand on the historic themes present at the Villages. The Commerce category would be appropriate as the Villages exemplified a turn in the motel industry, from independently owned to a successful franchise. This progression marked the first

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 23.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 23.

steps in the modernization of the roadside and reflects what motorists encounter today; large chain or franchised motels.

The Statement of Significance primarily looks at the significance of the chain as a whole and does not spend very much time on this particular sight. The writer takes a broad approach by describing the development of the roadside, the development of the motel industry and the practice of place-product-packaging. The Wigwam Village chain is discussed by describing Frank Redford's original idea, the morphology of Village Number 1 from a gas station to a motel, Redford's business model and merchandising. Perhaps this broad approach was used because this was the first Village to be nominated. One of the two authors of this nomination form was Keith A. Sculle, the roadside historian whose books are heavily referenced in this thesis. Since this nomination form was so broad, perhaps it influenced Sculle to narrow his research and focus on the Wigwam Village chain, as evidenced in his extensive work "Frank Redford's Wigwam Village Chain: A Link in the Modernization of the American Roadside", also referenced in this thesis.

The presence of a basement in Village No. 2 is also significant as it was built to provide even more space to sell branded Native American souvenirs. Village 1 only had a small rectangular structure to sell to tourists. Frustrated with this physical limitation and foreseeing more revenue potential, Redford constructed a large basement under the dining room, seen during construction in Figure 5.2. This larger space foreshadows the merchandising opportunities that Redford eventually adopted. Village Number 2 was the only site to have a basement to serve this purpose. Its presence marks a significant step towards building a larger brand as it was meant to house paraphernalia pertaining to that brand and should thus be included in its nomination form.



Figure 5.2: The basement during Village Number 2's construction. Courtesy of Flickr user Wiley Brewer, <https://flic.kr/p/8aA7Av>.

Integrity

While the major structures of Village No. 2 have not been significantly altered, there are a number of details and changes that were not included in this National Register form. These types of changes do not necessarily effect the integrity of the site but instead tell an interesting story about the adaptability of the business over time.

Location – The location of Number 2 is unchanged. It is still located along North Dixie Highway, a major thoroughfare for visitors to the Mammoth Cave National Park.

Design – There are a number of physical alterations that the owners have undertaken over the years. One such noteworthy alteration was the Indian swastikas that originally adorned every unit. These were painted over in the years leading up to World War II, when the German Nazi's adopted the symbol. Swastikas are present in Redford's 1935 Design Patent 98,617, Figure 5.3.

While it is unlikely that anyone would champion for the reintroduction of these symbols for the

sake of historic integrity, their presence should be mentioned because it does reflect the history and climate of the 1940s. Village No. 2 is the only extant site that originally had these markings.

Feb. 18, 1936.

F. A. REDFORD
BUILDING
Filed Dec. 17, 1935

Des. 98,617

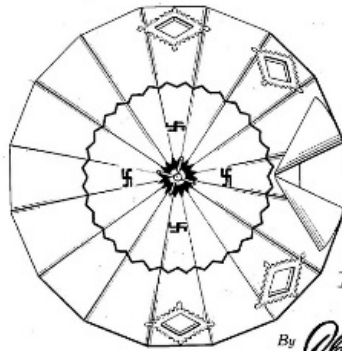
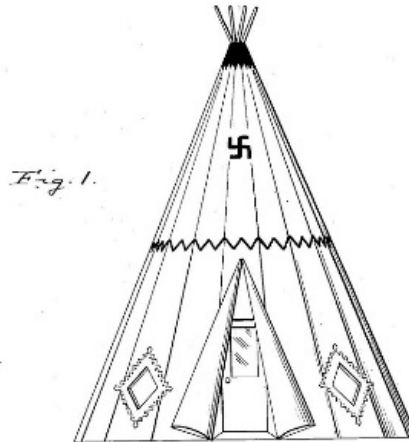


Fig. 2.

Inventor

F. A. Redford

By *Alvanee W. Dixon and*
Hyman Korman
Attorneys

Figure 5.3: Frank Redford's original 1935 patent included the swastika design for all units. The patent was updated in 1947 with the swastika detail not included. Figure U.S. Design Patent 98,617 from February 1936.

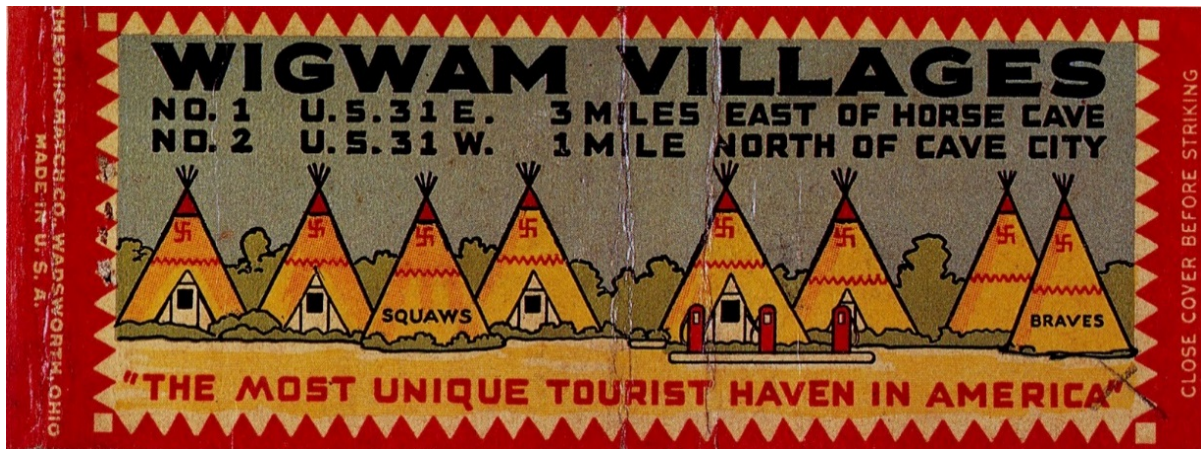


Figure 5.4: An early matchbook advertisement for Numbers 1 and 2. This matchbook can be dated to either the 1930s or early 1940s due to the presence of swastikas. Figure from Home Away From Home, 79.

Additionally, the original rectangular ‘Trading Post’ has been heavily altered. The original small frame structure, seen in Figure 5.5, had rustic wood siding and one-story pyramidal roof. It was used to sell souvenirs and promote the Village’s aesthetic Indian values. Native Americans were hired to run the shop and acted as authentic accessories to the building, as seen in Figure 5.5. Today, the structure still stands but has changed heavily in appearance and function. Instead of a rustic thematic treatment, the Trading Post now has vinyl siding and an asphalt shingled roof, as seen in Figure 5.6. Today, the structure houses an ice and vending machines. The date of these changes are unknown but aerial photographs used for promotional material featured the Trading Post as late as the early 2000s (an undated postcard shows the original Trading Post along with the Village’s website, suggesting this time period). The Trading Post is a hallmark of Frank Redford’s early design. They were only built at Village 1 and 2 and since Number 1 is no longer extant, the remains found at Number 2 are one of a kind.



Figure 5.5: An early tourist photograph that shows the original Trading Post. Courtesy of Flickr user Wiley Brewer, <https://flic.kr/p/8j6qHG>.



Figure 5.6: The front of No. 2 today. The Trading Post today houses an ice and vending machine. Figure from Google Maps.

The largest teepee today operates as an office and check-in space but was originally the lunchroom. The change in function no doubt changed the character of the interior of the 52 feet tall structure. Figure 5.7 shows the interior of the original lunchroom, while Figure 5.8 shows the current function of the space. The exterior remains mostly unchanged but the main sign, tempting drivers to pull over and ‘Sleep in a Wigwam’ originally called for drivers to pull over and ‘Eat and Sleep in a Wigwam’ (Figure 5.9). When the building changed functions, the owners at the time, the Lewis family, simply took off the initiation to dine with them (Figure 5.10). Today the sign still attractively glows and welcomes visitors. These changes should be included in a National Register nomination as they show the adaptability of the business over time.



Figure 5.7: The original lunch counter at Number 2 Courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58Qxwv>.



Figure 5.8: The former dining room now serves as a check-in office and gift shop. Courtesy of Flickr user Wiley Brewer, <https://flic.kr/p/8kjJax>.

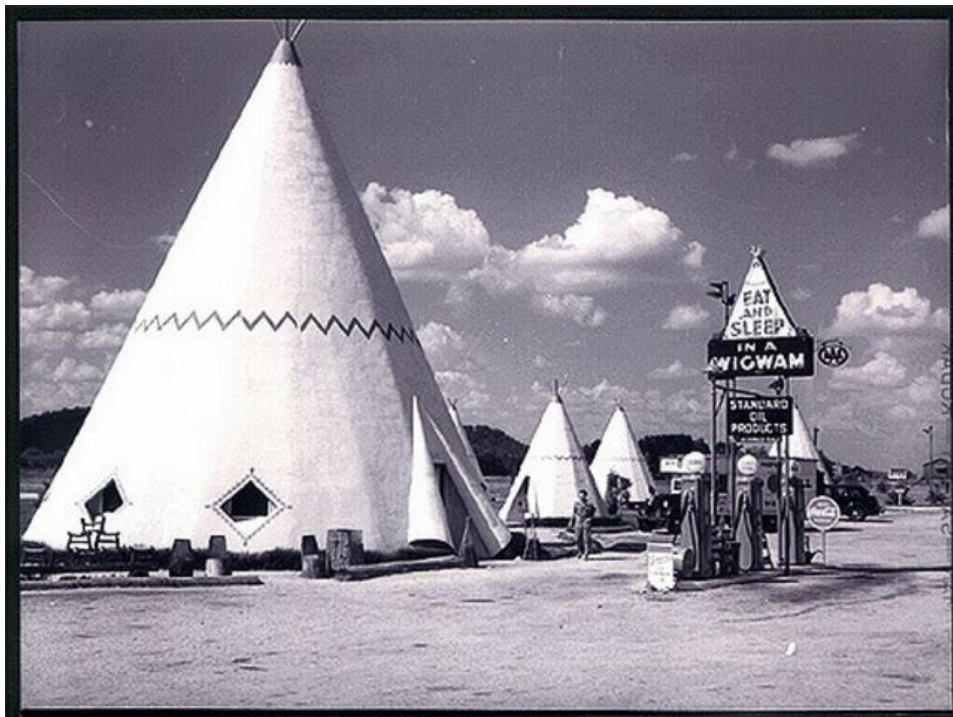


Figure 5.9: The sign at Village Number 2 reads “EAT AND SLEEP IN A WIGWAM”. Courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58Qu7K>.



Figure 5.10: The present sign at Village Number 2 was altered when the lunchroom was converted into an office and gift shop. The sign now reads “SLEEP IN A WIGWAM”. Courtesy of Flickr user Christopher P. Bills, <https://flic.kr/p/5WaDcm>.

Setting – The surrounding area of Number 2 is largely unchanged. North Dixie Highway has developed as a light commercial strip but still retains its agricultural setting with surrounding farm lands. The immediate neighbors of Number 2 are a small church, a wooded lot, an open field and a trailer park named Wigwam Village Trailer Park.

Materials – The materials found on site are near identical to those found in the period of significance. All of the Wigwams still consist of steel angle irons covered in concrete-like stucco. Only the small gift shop, seen in Figure 5.6 has altered materials.

Workmanship - Originally owned by Frank Redford, Number 2 still reflects his work. Since then, the Village has passed through a number of owners, these owners made no significant changes to the workmanship of the site.

Feeling – While the integrity of feeling is intangible and thus subjective, Village Number 2 has the same feeling for visitors as it once did. Aiding in this integrity is the continued use of this site as a home for transient motorists, often families. The original neon sign still invited visitors to stay, much as it did in the 1930s. Because Number 2 is located near a major tourist site, Mammoth Cave National Park, the feeling of sightseeing and family vacation time has been successfully preserved.

Association – Number 2 still operates as a rest stop for tourists so it is still associated with its original intention. Its outlandish design is still intact and can be easily associated with commerce and advertising of the early roadside. Association is achieved through the successful integrity of setting, location, design, workmanship, materials, and feeling, all of which Number 2 has successfully maintained.

Name of Property: Wigwam Village #6 (for more information, see APPENDIX B)

Wigwam Village Number 6 is listed as nationally significant in the areas of Transportation and Architecture. These two categories are fitting for this site, as it was for Number 2. Also fitting would be the Commerce category. This site differs from the other extant sites because it is the only one that was built and owned by someone who was not Frank Redford. This Village is the only site that came into existence using Redford's patent and franchising system. Since this business chain is important for being an early frontrunner of the modernization of the roadside, this should be listed on their nomination form. Paul Lewis, the son of original owner Chester E. Lewis and close friend of Frank Redford, drafted the nomination form. Despite their relationship as business partners, Redford and Lewis were also lifelong friends. In a display of affection, Chester took a large Indian doll to Redford's home during his dying days. Chester's wife recalls her husband considering Redford "chief of all the wigwams."¹¹⁸ This close relationship was briefly mentioned in the nomination form but represents a unique informal business arrangement that is mostly absent along today's roadside franchises. By including this in the Statement of Significance section, a clear understanding of the historic commercial value in Number 6 can be understood.

The existing Statement of Significance is relatively short and begins with the qualifications of the site as it satisfies the registration requirements in the Multiple Property Document entitled "Historic US Route 66 in Arizona". Within the Multiple Property Nomination, Village Number 6 qualifies under the "Traveler Related Facilities" property type and its satisfaction of 1. Association, 2. Design, Location, and Workmanship, and 3. Feeling and

¹¹⁸ Sculle, Keith A. "Oral History: A Key to Writing the History of American Roadside Architecture ." *Journal of American Culture* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 87.

Setting. The author then briefly describes the early days of Frank Redford's business and the adoption of the patent by Chester E. Lewis in the late 1940s. The remainder of this section necessarily describes the site's inclusion in the Multiple Property Nomination. The site is relevant for its continued association with the roadside lodging industry catering to Route 66 family tourism. Their design, location, and workmanship are original and the work of both Redford and Lewis. Few things have changed since 1950 such as interior furnishings and electric and plumbing fixtures. Feeling and association have been maintained at Number 6 as well. The building and layout of the site still attract media publicity and tourism. This is demonstrated by the continued success of nostalgia-driven tourism.

The author successfully demonstrates the motivations for visitors to pull over and experience the site. Visitors come "to escape from the modernism of the day just as visitors did decades ago, another to briefly open the nostalgic capsule of his/her childhood visit when the Baby Boomers were just toddlers, another to enjoy the Indian motif of the setting, and yet another just to photograph the novelty village."¹¹⁹ The inclusion of visitor motivations is effective in this listing and could be applied to all three extant sites. This description however takes on particular significance for Number 6 and Number 7, the two extant sites located along the original Route 66. These two sites capture Route 66 tourists who actively seek out these nostalgic Americana experiences. This could be reflected more clearly in an expanded history of Route 66 tourism as it pertains to the American road trip and the structures built to serve this industry. By including Village Number 6 (and by proxy Number 7), the Wigwams could be more closely associated with the widely accepted historic landscape of Route 66.

¹¹⁹ Paul Lewis, "Wigwam Village # 6" National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Wigwam Motel, L.L.C., Midland, TX, May 2, 2002.

As mentioned in the nomination, Number 6 was closed for overnight visitors from 1974 to 1988. During this era, the Village did not function commercially in any other capacity except to sell gasoline in 1984. The closing of the motel portion of the Village was due to the drastically reduced number of customers traveling through the small towns that were by-passed by the interstate highway system in the early 1970s. This stoppage reflected the hardships that many business owners faced both on Route 66 and in other small towns across the country. Because this nomination form was approved for national significance, this history should be included. By including this, a more thorough history can be gleaned of the Villages over time and their response to the changing business climate.

As this is the only extant Village owned and operated by a franchise owner, there are a number of physical differences not highlighted in the National Register Nomination. Redford was noted as being very lackadaisical about the design specifics of other owners. He rarely told owners how to decorate or operate their business.¹²⁰ One such departure, Lewis framed his structures in wood, unlike the other sites, framed in metal. Chester Lewis was also the only owner to construct his Wigwams in a rectangular shape-all other sites were arranged in either a horseshoe shape or an arc facing the highway. Perhaps this was a design choice or because of the limitation of the Holbrook lot. However, early promotional postcards of the site strongly resemble the graphics of Wigwam No. 2's and erroneously show the site as being in an arc shape. Perhaps this was to keep with the graphic branding of earlier sites, despite it being inaccurate. These departures, despite their being nominal, are important in showing the evolution of the Village chain. Construction methods and design choices were subjective to the owner and depart from the more rigid business systems we see today.

¹²⁰ Sculle, "Oral History", 85.

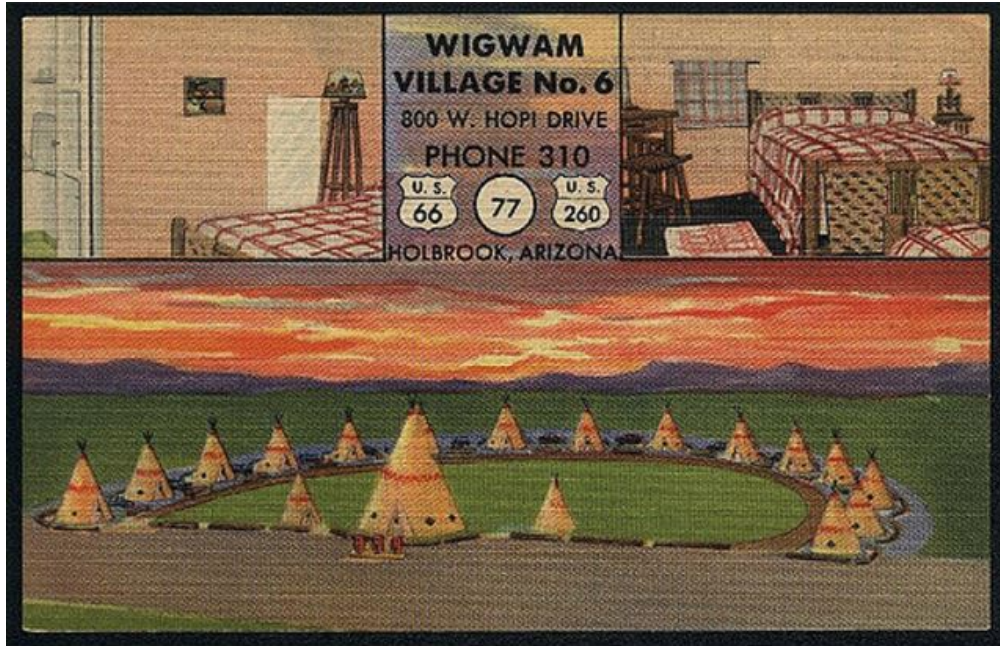


Figure 5.11: This early postcard of Number 6 is inaccurate but successfully aligns with promotional graphics. Courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/58UGjA>.



Figure 5.12: A present day aerial view shows the original rectangular layout designed by Chester Lewis. Figure from Google Maps.

Integrity

Location - The location of Number 6, along Route 66, is unchanged.

Design - The majority of the structures at Number 6 remain unchanged and what has been altered is adequately described in the National Register nomination. The largest alteration is the original office teepee, prominent in all of the other sites. Built in 1950, the original structure was 30 feet in diameter and 40 feet high and acted as the main check-in office and also the service-station, seen prominently in Figure 5.13. The original office only stood until 1956, when it was razed because it was not large enough to handle the traffic of people in the office for both the motel and the service station during peak business months of the year.¹²¹ While the loss of the original office effects the integrity of the Village for design, the rectangular building that took its place no doubt has historic merit. Built in 1956, this is the building that most visitors have seen when passing by or staying the night, seen in Figure 5.14. As only a comparably small number of people have seen the original teepee office, the structure that stands today is still associated with the history of the motel.

¹²¹ Lewis, "Wigwam Village # 6".

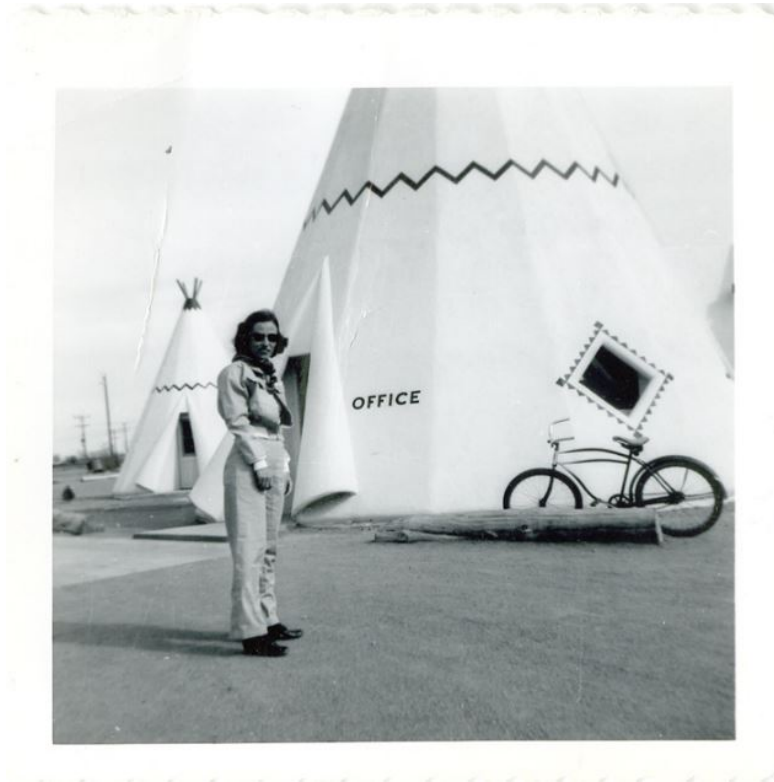


Figure 5.13: A tourist stands in front of the original teepee office at Number 6. Courtesy of Flickr user photo_history, <https://flic.kr/p/dBRLRt>.



Figure 5.14: The office at Village Number 6 as it exists today. Courtesy of Flickr user Kelly Ludwig, <https://flic.kr/p/a1NWj9>.

Setting – Route 66 has no doubt changed drastically over the years. Affectionately referred to as ‘The Mother Road’ in literature and popular culture, Route 66 was one of the original highways within the U.S. Highway System. Along with being a popular route for a new vacationing public in the 1940’s 50’s and 60’s, the Route also served as a major thoroughfare for transients during the Great Depression. Route 66 was bypassed in 1956 with the signing of the Interstate Highway Act which effectively guided travelers to different, faster routes. Gradually businesses along Route 66 were forced to close or change uses because of a declining customer base. Today, Route 66 is visited by history and architecture buffs and treated as a piece of Americana nostalgia. The setting of Number 6 therefore has changed over time in that much of its visitors have traveled on this road specifically to see sights as itself. Many of the businesses along Route 66 and specifically Holbrook, Arizona have transformed to cater to these nostalgic visitors. While the nature of these businesses surrounding Number 6 have changed, the general layout, along a commercial corridor has remain unchanged.

Materials – The materials at Number 6 have remained the same and thus have integrity. This Village is framed in wood, instead of angle iron, as Number 2 was. All of the framed wood is original along with the stucco. Minor repairs have taken place over time and the stucco has been repaired but done so in a historically accurate manner. The loss of the major teepee office structure effects the overall materials used because the rectangular office was built at a different time and with different technologies.

Workmanship – Number 6 was constructed by Chester E. Lewis and has remained in the family since. All 18 contributing structures are that of Mr. Lewis, under the guidance of Frank Redford, a close friend.

Feeling – Much like Number 2 and Number 7, Village Number 6 maintains its integrity of feeling. While subjective, staying at Number 6 is directly linked with a period of time during the early roadside. This feeling could be conveyed more if the original neon sign was still intact, as it is at Number 2. All the Villages were advertised and naturally appealed to visiting families, as they are today. Most people who stay at Number 6 are on vacation and have come to see this roadside attraction, something common with the past.

Association – Since Number 6 is still in operation as a motel for tourists, it is still strongly associated with its original purpose. Its kitschy decorations and programmatic architecture are still used as tools to attract visitors, much as they did at its inception. Because association is achieved through the successful integrity of all of the other aspects, Number 6 is largely linked with a successful association with its past.

Name of Property: Wigwam Village No. 7 (for more information, see APPENDIX C)

Village Number 7 is listed as being significant in the areas of Commerce and Architecture. This is the first nomination form of the Villages to accurately list Commerce in relation to a type of travel accommodation developed in response to automobile tourism. Number 7's location along historic Route 66 ties it in with the larger network of commercial activity catering to motoring tourists. For this reason, Number 7 is listed along with the Historic US Route 66 in California Multiple Property Documentation Form. As listed in the other nominations, Transportation could be another category that would be accurate, because of its placement along Route 66 and because the nomination adhered to criteria C. Criteria C denotes that the Villages are significant because they embody a distinct architectural style. Since the architectural style, programmatic, is in response to the automobile, this would be an accurate area of significance.

While the other two nomination forms list the construction date as the period of significance, Number 7 lists a 24-year period from 1950 to 1974. The period of significance begins with the completion of the construction and the opening to customers in 1950 and ends with the completion of Interstate 15. When I-15 was completed, it connected to I-10 and effectively by-passed the segment of Route 66 in which Number 7 is located. The author explains that this marked the end of the heyday of use for this segment of Route 66. While the completion of the interstate no doubt changed the flow of traffic through San Bernardino, the Wigwam Village still exemplifies early motel development and programmatic architecture. The author has chosen to link Number 7's significance strongly with Route 66 even though another extant Village, Number 2, gleams significance even though it is not on Route 66. While a location

on the historic route is no doubt important, the Wigwam Villages, as had been argued in this thesis, are valuable, independent of their location.

Number 7 sets itself apart from all of the other Villages in that it is the only one whose formation includes a double arc. The first 11 units were completed in 1949 and make up the inner semi-circle. The outer 8 units were complete in 1953. Also, Number 7 is the only site that has an original rectangular gift shop and lobby with a flat roof and overhang. The rear of the rectangular office building is connected to a two story apartment unit in the shape of a teepee. The apartment unit is where Frank Redford lived until his passing in 1961 and today houses the current owners. There are no written records as to why Redford decided to pursue this altered design. This, along with other inconsistencies mark the informal design guidelines that even Redford though suitable to bend with his needs.

The completion of Interstate 20 left the area around Number 7 lacking in a steady flow of customers. Consequently, the business suffered in the years after. When Frank fell ill a few years after Number 7 was complete, his old friend Paul Young came to California to run the business until Frank's death in 1961. Paul Young had purchased Village 1 and 2 in 1944 and continued a close friendship with Redford over the years. This friendship, similar to Redford and Lewis in Village 2, was a hallmark of the early informal years of the chain motel. Since Redford had never set up a proper corporate structure to ensure the chain would continue, Number 7 entered a period with multiple owners after Redford's death. Some of the owners held much lower standards than Frank and the Village fell into disrepair. The new owners neglected the hard-earned wholesome reputation of the early chains and started to invite passerby to "do it in a teepee."¹²² In 1991, the back of Number 7's business card offered such amenities as mirrored

¹²² Margolies, Home away from home, 47.

rooms, XXX movies, and hourly rates of \$15 and up.¹²³ The nomination form does not include such specifics and perhaps it is unnecessary to do so. However, the seedy history of Number 7 is unique to this site and exemplifies the economic downturn that many businesses face when their town is bypassed by the Interstate.



Figure 5.15: The 1991 sign tells passerby what they can do in a teepee. Figure from *Home Away From Home*, 47.

Integrity

Location – The location of Number 7, along the original Route 66, is unchanged.

Design - Under new management, Village Number 7 underwent significant rehabilitation in 2003 and 2005. Their work was praised and the owners, the Patel family, were awarded the National Historic Route 66 Federation’s 2005 Cyrus Avery Award for outstanding preservation project. All of the work was done to counteract the years of neglect from past owners including replacing doors and windows. When this nomination form was done, the zigzags had completely

¹²³ Ibid.

been painted over. Since then, additional efforts have been made to return the units to their original color scheme, as shown in Figure 5.17.



Figure 5.16: The Village in 2000, before the painting renovations. Note the continuation of Frank Redford's Indian aesthetic as shown with the cleaning woman's uniform. Courtesy of Flickr user John4kc, <https://flic.kr/p/7gbHn8>.



Figure 5.17: Number 7 today, displaying Redford's original design scheme. Figure from Google Maps.

One alteration however did not take place, nor was it talked about in the nomination form. A picture from 1956, Figure 5.18, shows the placement of neon over the large office and service station unit. Since Frank Redford was still alive and operating the chain in 1956, this would have been an original design element lost with time. The smaller sleeping cabins in the background do not appear to have this detail. Although this photograph is in black and white, the zigzag shape appears to be original, as later photos show a much larger shape and a different top detail, as seen in Figure 5.16. There is a slight possibility that Paul Young, the owner of Number 1 and 2, came out to run the businesses when Redford fell ill and made this neon addition. This would be odd however since there is no proof that a neon zigzag detail was ever present in Kentucky. While this nomination form was easily the most thorough, a look into this eye-catching motif needs to be looked into to increase integrity.



Figure 5.18: A young woman stands next to the original office structure with a neon zigzag detail. Courtesy of Flickr user roadsidequest, <https://flic.kr/p/jdFcEy>.

Setting – When Number 7 was built and completed, the surrounding area was largely orange groves, seen in historic aerials of the area in the late 1940s to late 1960s¹²⁴. Along with many other large towns, suburban development reached out from Los Angeles and developed in the years after World War II. By 1968, nearly all of the orange groves were replaced with services associated with suburban growth instead of Route 66 travelers. Route 66, as mentioned in Setting

¹²⁴ Sara Gredler, Heather Goodson, Chad Moffett, and Emily Pettis, “Wigwam Village No. 7.” National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Mead & Hunt, Inc., Sacramento, CA, September 28, 2011.

for Number 6, was drastically altered after the 1956 passing of the Interstate Highway Act. In San Bernardino, Route 66 was effectively bypassed by I-15 in 1974, the ending date for the Period of Significance. Because of this complete transformation of the setting surrounding Number 7, it would be hard to say that the site maintains setting. While the nature of these businesses surrounding Number 7 have changed, the immediate site, along with circulation routes remains unchanged.

Materials – The materials used are original to the sites construction, namely wood, plaster and concrete. There is no written records as to why Redford built with wood, perhaps it was his strong relationship and trust of Chester Lewis, owner and builder of Village Number 6.

Workmanship – The workmanship is largely original and the work of Frank Redford. Although, because of a change in owners, some historically insensitive alterations and lack of documentation, it is likely that much of the conditions today have been recreated to appear as they did in the 1950s.

Feeling – The integrity of feeling is subjective and thus difficult to define. A visit to Number 7 conveys a direct link to early roadside architecture and motel form. Most visitors seek out this unique architecture because they feel this harkens back to a distinctly American pastime. This feeling of the early roadside could be conveyed more if the original neon sign was still intact, as it is at Number 2.

Association - Aiding in the integrity of association of Number 7 is the continued use of the site as a tourist lodging. Although the Village entered a time of unfriendly family activities, as seen in Figure 5.15, today the site is a popular place for children and adults, which was its original visitor base. As a business that has continued operation as a tourist lodging, the site still conveys to visitors an intact vestige of the early roadside.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

You could go on like that forever. The American autoist does, reacting delicately to the wonders of this land out of the midst of his easy coma, in ways so revealing of his inmost mind that someone must one day do a trilogy in his honor, in full homage to his roadside. The work won't date, we can assure you. Not, at any rate, before the spirit that most deeply moves this people is tamed out of their blood.¹²⁵



Figure 6.1: A family photo from a vacation at Wigwam Village 2, circa 1944. Courtesy of Flickr user Brian Butko, <https://flic.kr/p/5k9GGX>.

The story of the Great American Road is the story of the Wigwam Villages. The perseverance and continued success of the Villages acts as a homage to the early roadside in a number of ways. The development of the Wigwams closely parallels the development of

¹²⁵ James Agee, "The Great American Roadside," *Fortune Magazine* (September 1934), 175.

roadside lodging and acts as a precursor to large-chain development. Their outlandish shape exemplifies the ways in which early roadside entrepreneurs enticed customers. The flagrant use of Native American symbology also mirrors the use of such themes by the American advertising industry. For all these reasons, the Wigwam Village chain stands as a testament to the nature of the early roadside. This chapter looks at the relatively new field of roadside preservation as it explains both the advantages and disadvantages of preserving the Wigwams. This chapter will also look at the interpretation of the Villages along with suggestions on how to expand. In accurately portraying the history of this site to the public, a continued value will be placed on the business and thus its continued success.

Preservation efforts of the early roadside are a relatively new pursuit. Once decried as an unworthy landscape, the roadside today is becoming recognized as significant to American history. An increase in appreciation may come with new generations, as most people do not appreciate things built in their life time as being historic. Nostalgia for the early roadside may also be gleaned when looking at the “homogenized national uniformity”¹²⁶ seen among the highways today. The architecture of the national lodging chains was born of the modern movement which strove to do away with the ornament, humor and spontaneity¹²⁷ of the early roadside. The first of these early businesses listed on the National Register was The Modern Diner in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Listed in 1978, the 1930s Diner marked the beginning of federally recognized roadside businesses.

¹²⁶ John Margolies and C. Ray Smith, *The end of the road: photographs and text* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books in collaboration with the Hudson River Museum, 1981), 15.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 13.

The Society for Commercial Archaeology, founded one year before the Modern Diner's listing, was one of the pioneers in preserving twentieth century commercial heritage. The SCA is devoted to preserve, document and celebrate this history through publications, conferences and tours of buildings, artifacts, structures, signs and symbols of the roadside¹²⁸. Such organized groups grant legitimacy to preserving the roadside and act as educational tools for those wanting to know more. Through their publications, they use preservation terminology that equips the average reader with the language necessary to advocate for these places, such as seeking nomination on the National Register for their beloved places. Their yearly 'Falling by the Wayside' feature also alerts readers to properties endangered by new development or costly maintenance. Contact information is given for each property to connect owners with advocates willing to help. Groups such as the Society for Commercial Archaeology aid in roadside preservation and create a welcome landscape for businesses such as the Wigwam Villages to be appreciated and to thrive.

Many vestiges of the early roadside must be repurposed as different businesses in order to remain standing. Gas stations are an increasingly popular example of adaptive reuse, as many older gas stations have outdated equipment and are unattractive or too small for large corporations like Exxon or Texaco to continue large-scale gas business. Classic gas station architecture that once serviced vehicles now serve customers coffee, alcohol or pizza, as is the case at Automatic Pizza in Athens, Georgia. Diners have also been increasingly recognized as architecturally valuable and thus appreciated and preserved. The restaurant model is one that has lasted over time and generally has not changed. Food can be served out of almost any sized

¹²⁸ "About the SCA." Society for Commercial Archaeology. Accessed January 10, 2017. <http://sca-roadside.org/about-sca/>.

building and the social and physical memories of classic diners lives on today. Most reused diners still function as places of gathering and food. The American diner has many admirers and even has its own museum, the American Diner Museum, dedicated to “celebrating and preserving the cultural and historical significance of the American diner, a unique American institution.”¹²⁹

Of the three most common roadside businesses-gas, food, and lodging-the latter is the most difficult and has the greatest likelihood of obsolescence.¹³⁰ Many early motels were located along routes that were bypassed in the 1950s and 1960s. For this reason, many have closed and have not been attractive to further investment. With no travelers nearby to their small towns, many motels cease to operate as motels. There are only a few examples of adaptively reused motels but even these examples are of sites located within a relatively large city. Projects are often based on creating new living quarters, for either low-income resident or the aging population. Both of these purposes require a population that demands the service along with extensive investment. For those motels that are located in poor or rarely-traveled small towns, there is little hope of their preservation.

Gas stations and diners provide a brief experience and often rely on a repeat customer base. Motels on the other hand offer a comparatively longer experience and rely on a nomadic customer base passing through their area. The nature of the traveler then often only stays one night and rarely returns unless they travel to the area of the motel again. For this reason, it is difficult for small motels to gain a positive reputation which often relies on a repeat customer base. Furthermore, motels are places for bathing and sleeping, both intimate activities that

¹²⁹ "Diner preservation and restoration." American Diner Museum. Accessed February 21, 2017. <http://www.americandinermuseum.org/preservation.php>.

¹³⁰ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle. *Remembering roadside America: preserving the recent past as landscape and place* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 123.

require regimented cleaning habits. While some travelers may be fine with stopping for lunch at a diner they have never heard of, those same travelers would be hesitant at sleeping at a motel they didn't know the hygienic practices of. The old reputation of 'fleabag motels' persists today and harms only the small motel owner.

There are a number of vital characteristics that a small motel must possess in order to continue operation into the twenty-first century. The site must first be located along a route convenient to tourists. That is, along a major thoroughfare or near a popular tourism area. Along these popular routes or tourism areas there will inevitably be large chain competition. Major budget-friendly motels, such as Holiday Inn or Best Western, target these high traffic areas and can offer guests accommodations that small motels cannot. Modern conveniences such as cable television, high-speed internet, large bathrooms and even swimming pools are common amongst these big chains. Economies of scale and professional market research keep customer costs low and put these large chains at a major advantage. Furthermore, the American population has evolved to recognize and trust in brands. Travelers along the road know what kind of experience they will have at these lodgings and increasingly do not want to 'take the chance' at the unknown conditions of small motels.

This brand loyalty, although persistent and widespread, is changing with the advent of the internet. Visitors who plan ahead can seek out authentic and smaller run motels in areas they are not familiar with through sites like Tripadvisor or Yelp. These two websites are built on customer reviews which aids in creating vital reputations for good service. Crowdsourcing ratings for motels can only help bring in customers for worthy businesses. These sites also make motels accountable for visitor experiences. While the ideal customer would plan ahead and seek out small businesses, many do not and stop unpredictably when they are ready, relying on the

reputations of large chains, as mentioned above. All three extant Villages are mentioned on Tripadvisor: Number 2 with 275 reviews, 3 out of 5 stars, Number 6 with 858 reviews, 4 out of 5 stars and Number 7 with 848 reviews, 4.5 out of 5 stars. Reviews range from complaints about the run down conditions of the sleeping rooms, mostly in Kentucky, to the Wigwams being treasured as a fun place to stay. While some reviews are not favorable to a stay, the overwhelming majority remark on the history and vintage appeal. These review sites have the power to tip a skeptic into a future customer. Many pictures feature happy families and other reassurances of a positive stay. These sites are then an ally to the continued flow of visitors.

The Wigwam Villages are at a unique advantage to continue their success as a motel. While many early roadside lodgings are on less-traveled routes, two of the three extant Villages are located along Route 66 and the other is located near a National Park. Number 6 and 7 benefit off of the steady stream of tourism centered on the classic Americana road trip experience. These visitors are specifically interested in staying at small businesses, in order to capture the original experience of ‘the Mother Road’. Luckily, this nostalgic tourist base furnishes the Wigwams with visitors even though there are a number of large hotel chains nearby. Number 2, in Cave City, capitalizes on visitors to Mammoth Cave. Cave City however has much stiffer competition and traveling to this area is not on the nostalgic tour of Americana like the other two are. For this reason, fewer updates or renovations have taken place and it has fallen furthest behind in ratings.

Owners of successful old motels do so by being able to draw lodgers by blending some concessions to contemporary conveniences while also “playing on the yearnings of those who want something of a historical experience-the retro market.”¹³¹ Many historic motels, such as the

¹³¹ Jakle, *Remembering roadside America*, 124.

Blue Swallow Motel, now offer high-speed internet, cable television, restored bathrooms and air-conditioning in each unit. As noted above, while offering these modern comforts, they also offer reprinted historic stationary, rotary phones and vintage furnishings. To connect visitors and ‘fans’ of the motel to their preservation efforts, the Blue Swallow shares all updates to their Facebook page, Figure 6.2. Hundreds of pictures have been updated and documents the hard work and restorations that go into operating a small motel from this era. Sharing such news, past and future visitors feel like they are participating in (and funding) the history of the site while also celebrating the return of the motel.



Figure 6.2: While fixing an awning at the Blue Swallow Motel, the owner uncovers the older paint colors and shares with his image with Facebook in 2011. The motel is now painted this salmon pink stucco color. Figure courtesy of Kevin Mueller, Owner, The Blue Swallow Motel from The Blue Swallow Motel Facebook page.

The extant Villages no doubt require extensive maintenance, most of which is not conveyed to the public. This is a lost opportunity to engage both potential visitors and returning customers interested in seeing improvements. By creating preservation content for the public, a historic value is ascribed to the property. To readers, why else would a profit-minded business go

through all the trouble? Tripadvisor user Lindsay D. recounts “the wigwam were in very rough shape, but the manager has no claim on how hard they are to keep up.”¹³² Documented efforts could create interest and sympathy for the small business which could result in further support. The owners of the Villages can take cues on valuable improvements from these visitor review websites. For instance, most negative reviews for Number 2 remark on the run-down condition of the Wigwams, most of which could be fixed with small updates such as new latches for the doors, some re-tiling or just general cleaning and repainting (Figure 6.3). Such preservation efforts could also attract the attention of publications like the Society for Commercial Archaeology which creates positive press for businesses that share their preservation efforts.



Figure 6.3: Cosmetic renovations, such as the repainting of the sleeping units, could be an opportunity to connect with fans through social media. Figure from TripAdvisor user jeremykk1976.

¹³² Lindsay D. "Buyer beware...Seriously don't waste your time." Trip Advisor. August 2, 2016. Accessed February 2, 2017. https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g39265-d258948-Reviews-Wigwam_Village_Inn_2-Cave_City_Kentucky.html.



Figure 6.4: A missed opportunity for sharing preservation efforts. This picture was taken by a tourist during one of the major renovations at Number 7. Courtesy of Flickr user ewaldmire, <https://flic.kr/p/abTx8i>.

In order to create cohesion and to highlight their relation to each other, the Wigwam Villages must have a united, standardized name and branding. Number 2 is branded as ‘Wigwam Village Inn #2’ while Number 6 and 7 are ‘Wigwam Motel’. Perhaps poor conditions in Kentucky prompted the other owners to differentiate themselves. All three sites are owned by different owners and this wouldn’t necessarily suggest they are a corporate chain. Instead, being united under one name could be used as a way to relay their tied history. As this was one of the first chains and a forerunner for what has happened on the road since, this history should be valued. Having name cohesion reduces confusion and honors Frank Redford’s original plan.

Along with conveying their preservation, the Wigwam Villages must also be able to relay to visitors the importance of their site. Neither of the three extant Villages do an adequate job at

telling a comprehensive history and significance their sites. Number 2 makes some effort in their gift shop with a historic photo display, seen in Figure 6.4. Their collection of photographs and newspaper articles are not curated and thus hard to understand unless a viewer has extensive previous knowledge of the Villages. Number 6 houses a small museum behind their check in building that is sparse and has a few relics from the nearby Petrified Forest National Park along with some contemporary newspaper articles in a binder. Number 6 has also added classic 1950s cars parked in front of the sleeping units, Figure 6.5. The cars don't convey any information but instead create a 1950s nostalgic atmosphere and a popular photo opportunity. By allowing more space for interpretation on the early roadside industry and how the Villages fit into that history, visitors could fully understand and value their stay at the Wigwams. Through a full understanding of the significance of the site, an interest in their continued use and preservation could be linked.



Figure 6.5: The display in the gift shop at Number 2. Courtesy of Flickr user Wiley Brewer, <https://flic.kr/p/6z7Kdg>.



Figure 6.6: The classic car display at Number 6. Photo by author, August 2016. Figure by author.

The continued operation of the Wigwam Villages despite the dramatic changes in tourist tastes and expectations is indicative of their continued consumer appeal. Even in the more recent past, the Wigwam Villages have survived the heightened sensitivity to Native American cultural appropriation that has led to the renaming of sports teams¹³³, mascots¹³⁴, map features¹³⁵, and lawsuits against clothing manufacturers who exploit Native American themes¹³⁶. These high profile incidents are creating popular awareness of Native American appropriation. So far, the

¹³³ Belson, Ken, and Edward Wyatt. "Redskins Lose Ruling on Trademarks, but Fight Isn't Over." *New York Times*, June 18, 2014. Accessed April 14, 2017.

¹³⁴ Wise, Mike. "The Squabbling Illini: Rallying Cries Lead to Rift." *New York Times*, December 16, 2003. Accessed April 14, 2017.

¹³⁵ Sanders, Eli. "Renaming 'Squaw' Sites Proves Touchy in Oregon." *New York Times*, December 11, 2004. Accessed April 14, 2017.

¹³⁶ Landry, Alysia. "Navajo Nation and Urban Outfitters Reach Agreement on Appropriation." *Indian Country Today*, November 22, 2016. Accessed April 14, 2017.

Wigwam Villages had flown under this radar of outrage. Instead, the Wigwam Villages are still seen as an innocent throw-back to a less culturally sensitive time. The owners of all three of the Wigwam Villages must be aware of this deserving issue and take proactive action in order to be culturally sustainable in the years to come.

Kentucky, the location of the first Village, is home to several Native American nations, including the Cherokee, Shawnee, Navajo and others. David “Thundering Eagle” Fallis, Principal Chief of the Southern Cherokee Nation of Kentucky, states his opinion on the Native American themes present at Village Number 2:

Though the Southern Cherokee Nation of Kentucky would be extremely pleased for anything that brings attention to the history and ongoing plight of Native Americans everywhere, we do not welcome such things as ‘Wigwam Village.’ It is an absolute absurdity to portray Native Americans of this area as ‘wigwam’ dwellers --as you know, our people lived in log and mud huts and even had fortifications around many¹³⁷.

The blatant falsehoods of the Wigwam Villages serve as an opportunity to be a teaching tool. The Kentucky Native American Heritage Commission, whose mission is “to recognize and promote Native American contributions and influence in Kentucky’s history and culture¹³⁸” agrees. Helen Danser, chair of the Commission see the Villages as an educational tool and says “We would be more than happy to assist them in making an educational program in that Village¹³⁹.”

All three Villages display and sell Native American artifacts, furthering the false creation of a single tribe. None of the Villages offer any real information on the Native American tribes found in their respective locations, the tribes who actually used teepees for their nomadic

¹³⁷ Danaparamita, Aria. "Save Wigwam Village: On the Road to Cross-Cultural Communication." National Trust for Historic Preservation. July 17, 2013. Accessed April 14, 2017.

¹³⁸ "About the Kentucky Native American Heritage Commission." Kentucky: Heritage Council - Overview. Accessed April 14, 2017. <http://heritage.ky.gov/knahc/>.

¹³⁹ Danaparamita, Save Wigwam Villages.

lifestyles, traditional teepee materials, wigwam materials or who traditionally lived in these wigwams. Each Wigwam Village has the unique opportunity of reaching out to appropriate groups, such as the Kentucky Native American Heritage Commission, to ask for educational assistance. Along with presenting educational content on the Native Americans they seek to represent, the Wigwams could also convey the history of using these images for commercial gain. As in this thesis, a history of Native American appropriation can be included with a discussion of the architecture of the early roadside. The Wigwam history is intrinsically tied to all of these themes and a comprehensive, curated display could convey this. Not only is this a great opportunity to educate, but also a great tool in creating value.

The newest market trend in tourism is experiential travel. Pre-packaged tourism is no longer sufficient for today's travelers who view twenty-seven different sites on average before booking a trip¹⁴⁰. These travelers are seeking out visual content that shows authentic travel experiences through review sites and social media. To these travelers, "authenticity is showing the reality of a place – good and bad¹⁴¹." Not only do visitors want to observe and take pictures of the cultural experience, they now want to participate as well. Tour operators and hotels are responding to this demand by finding genuine ways in which visitors can interact with other people and cultures in a meaningful way. Travelers in this market, value the journey more than the destination and are willing to travel longer and engage with the local economy more so than in the past.

This market trend is beneficial to the Wigwam Villages in a number of ways. A trip to the Wigwam Villages is not a Native American experience but an authentically American one. The

¹⁴⁰ Fuggle, Lucy. "The rise of experiential travel and its impact on tours and activities." Tour Operator Online Booking Software. Accessed April 14, 2017.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

symbols present at all three of these sites harken back to a time when their use was not only deemed appropriate, but also profitable. Along with this American experience, visitors to the Villages are also taking part in the road trip experience which is both classically American and a classically personal experience. The symbols gleaned from a stay at the Wigwam add symbolism and complexity to the trip and leave visitors asking questions about the cultural morality of America's past and future.

Historic preservation was born from the desire to establish identity. First used as a political tool during eighteenth-century France¹⁴², historic preservation today still accomplishes the same. The American roadside is closely linked with American identity. Nowhere else did the automobile transform, without hesitation, a whole landscape and nowhere else did roadside commercial activity proliferate so freely as it did in the United States. With limited regulations, the car transformed where Americans lived, how they lived and how they vacationed. The preservation of the businesses that sprang up to service this restructuring of life is important in celebrating an American identity. Businesses such as The Wigwam Villages are vital to telling this story and must be carefully preserved to convey this history.

¹⁴² Jukka, Jokilehto. *A history of architectural conservation* (London: Routledge, 2012)

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APPENDIX A:

Name of Property: Wigwam Village No. 2

Nomination Received: February 5, 1988

Location: Cave, City, Kentucky

Category of Property: District

Contributing: 19 buildings, 1 object

Historic and Current Functions: Domestic, Hotel

Description: Other-Novelty/roadside vernacular

Significant: Nationally

Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: Transportation, Architecture

Period of Significance: 1937

APPENDIX B:

Name of Property: Wigwam Village #6

Nomination Received: May 2, 2002

Location: Holbrook, Arizona

Category of Property: Buildings

Contributing: 18 buildings

Historic and Current Functions: Domestic, Hotel

Description: Other-Novelty/roadside vernacular

Significant: Nationally

Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: Transportation, Architecture

Period of Significance: 1950

APPENDIX C:

Name of Property: Wigwam Village No. 7

Nomination Received: September 28, 2011

Location: San Bernardino, California

Category of Property: Buildings

Contributing: 21 buildings, 1 structure, 1 object

Noncontributing: 2 structures, 1 objects

Historic and Current Functions: Domestic, Hotel

Description: Other: Programmatic

Significant: Nationally

Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: Commerce, Architecture

Period of Significance: 1950-1974