

THE ANCIENT AND HONORABLE ORDER OF
E CLAMPUS VITUS

BILLY HOLCOMB CHAPTER 1069

PRESENTS

H.E.M.O.R.R.H.O.I.D. XXI

ROUTE 66: AMBOY TO GOFFS

CELEBRATING 80 YEARS



COMPILED BY VICE NOBLE GRAND HUMBUG PAUL "GATLIN' GUN" RENNER
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E CLAMPUS VITUS
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UNDER THE AEGIS OF
PAUL "GATLIN' GUN" RENNER
ANNOUNCES

HOLCOMB'S **E**XTRAORDINARY **M**EMBERS **O**NLY **R**EDSHIRT **R**ENDEZVOUS AND
HAPPENING **O**F **I**NSANE **D**OINGS

XXI

**"ROUTE 66: AMBOY TO GOFFS--
CELEBRATING EIGHTY YEARS"**

MARCH 17, 18, 19 2006

(OR, IN THE RECKONING OF OUR ORDER, 6011)

AS RECORDED BY THE VICE HUMBUG,

SUPPLEMENTED BY THE ACCOUNTS OF HIS FRIENDS AND THE

LEARNINGS OF THE WISE: SID BLUMNER, XSNGH; MIKE JOHNSON, CLAMPATRIARCH;

AND BILL PEARSON, XNGH

ROUTE 66 THROUGH THE CALIFORNIA DESERT

BEGINNINGS

America has always been a nation in motion: west to the Mississippi after the Revolution, west to the Continental Divide following the Louisiana Purchase, west again to the Pacific Coast after the war with Mexico. Like many of today's highways, Route 66 has its roots in the nation's old pack and wagon roads. The first trails followed paths used for centuries by Native Americans. In 1857 Lieutenant Edward Fitzgerald Beale was commissioned by Congress to survey a route along the 35th parallel from Fort Defiance to the Colorado River. Known as Beale's Wagon Road, this route established an important communications and transportation link between east and west. Its westward extension between the Colorado River and Los Angeles became what we now call the Mojave Road.

The last third of the nineteenth century brought the railroad into southern California. The Atlantic and Pacific built west from Arizona, while the Southern Pacific built east from California. The railroad entered California through Needles on the Colorado River, and followed a route south of the Mojave Road, avoiding the rough terrain through which that trail passed. The railroad skirted the Providence, Old Dad, and Bristol Mountains to the north, reaching Barstow about 200 miles west of Needles. Small towns were established along this route to provide water for the thirsty steam locomotives. The towns were "...named by the Santa Fe for no particular reason, except for alphabetical order starting with Amboy: Amboy, Bristol, Cadiz, Danby, Edson, Fenner, Goffs, Homer, Ibis, Java." (Moore and Cunningham, 2003) Later, Edson became Essex and Bristol became

Bengal. By 1897 the route was operated by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad.

The turn of the twentieth century brought the advent and increasing popularity of the automobile. Early automobile roads were basically converted wagon roads with little or no improvements. These roads were poorly marked, if they were marked at all. As the popularity of the automobile increased, it became obvious that better roads and a better marking system were needed. However, there was no central organization coordinating any of these efforts, and each local trail or highway association marked roads in its own way. Of course, these random numbering systems created nightmares for early travelers, so in 1924 the Secretary of Agriculture created a board of state and federal highway authorities to standardize a national highway system. It was Cyrus Avery and Frank Sheets who proposed a highway from Chicago to Los Angeles, connecting various trails that passed through America's heartland and into the west.

Originally proposed as Route 60, Route 66 in California paralleled the Santa Fe Railroad for most of the distance from Needles to Los Angeles. The highway passed through the railroad watering stops on the way and, in many cases, small communities with gas stations and other services developed in these locales. At first the road was unpaved, and followed the National Trails Highway. Temperatures in the summertime were extreme, and veterans knew to travel the desert section from Needles to Barstow at night. Even in the winter time travel in the early days of Route 66 could be perilous, as the possibility of getting stuck in the sand was ever-present along much of the way. By the beginning of the 1930's,

however, much of the desert section had been paved, fortuitous because of the increase in traffic the Mother Road was about to see.

THE ROAD AND THE DEPRESSION YEARS

Sid Blumner, XSNGH

Background

To understand the traffic on the road that would occur during the depression until World War II, it is at first necessary to review the economic conditions in the United States that would eventually lead to the migration west that occurred in the 1930's. The so called "Roaring Twenties" brought economic growth to almost all sectors of the economy save our farm sector. The farm sector's last good years ended in about the early twenties as Europe recovered from World War I and the demand for American farm products in Europe declined. By the time of the Great Depression, beginning in October 1929, the agricultural sector of the United States was lagging behind the rest of the economy. Farmers faced foreclosure, and people were losing their homes. Thirty per cent of the total population was unemployed and, as farmers lost their farms and livelihood, it was difficult for them to find work.

Drought struck the Midwest during the period of the early 1930's. Because of the farming techniques in use at that time, much of the land was subject to wind and water erosion. Soil conservation practices were largely ignored. Beginning in 1932, dust storms swallowed the nation's heartland. Farmers who had not lost their homes and farms due to economic conditions lost the soil on them due to the wind.

This created a drought-stricken area in which the top soil had blown away. Many farmers stayed on to fight nature and the economy but many of them began to migrate west to what was considered the promised land of California.

The so called “Okies” (people from Oklahoma) and “Arkies” (people from Arkansas) began to migrate west to California. (There were people from all over on the move; not just Oklahoma and Arkansas). Most believed that if they could just get to California they could find work and make a home in the agricultural sector of the state. The migrants packed what belongings that they could into some type of transportation, sold what they could not take, and what they could not sell they left behind. Having done this, the migrants took to the road.

The Road

Route 66, the so called “Mother Road” was assigned its now famous number in 1926. The Road was paved in California by the time of the Depression. The Road entered California at Needles and followed the original dirt route from Needles to Santa Monica. Route 66 was a two-lane road from Chicago to Santa Monica. Towns and stops were located about every twenty miles. Even with communities and stops every twenty miles or so, Route 66 in the desert area was a lonely, desolate place. After Kingman, Arizona, the migrants found themselves in desert terrain until reaching San Bernardino, California.

Travel on the Road During the 1930s

By the 1930’s, Route 66 was a well traveled highway. The migrants crossed into California via the Needles Bridge across the Colorado River. (The bridge is still in place but is not used by autos). Often, right after entry they were stopped and

confronted by county Sheriffs or State Police. While they could not stop the migrants, these officers discouraged them from entering California whenever possible. This was done for two reasons. First, the agricultural jobs in the Central Valley were limited and there were already more workers than jobs. Secondly, many of the migrants had little or no money and California's welfare system was out of funds and could not aid the migrants. The feeling was that the fewer the people who entered the state with little or no funds the better off the state would be if they were kept out. If the migrants survived the "port of entry" hassle they found themselves in Needles. Needles represented their last major supply stop before the desert. Communities and stops in the desert had only basic supplies and services. Each of these stops represented a little oasis in the desert to the weary migrant.

The migrants tended to travel in groups for mutual support. Each group helped its members. Communities such as Essex, Chambliss, Danby, Ludlow, and Barstow and stops such as Siberia (long gone) represented a place where one might be able to get a drink of water and find a mechanic who could fix their transportation. These communities were crowded with cars and trucks that had been abandoned and were used for parts. These vehicles were left behind by their owners who could not afford the repairs. Route 66 was also littered with disabled, abandoned vehicles and household goods tossed aside by people who could no longer transport them. Here and there a grave could be found for those migrants who did not survive the trip. Today we see names spelled in rocks along the side of the road. These are a reminder of a tradition that goes back to the 1930's when the migrants left their marks in the forms of rocks to indicate they had been there so

they would not be forgotten. It was a long, hard trip which ended when they got to San Bernardino and were out of the heat and desert. From San Bernardino many of the migrants continued on to Los Angeles. Many traveled Route 99 to the central valley where they hoped to find work.

The migration of those fleeing the Dust Bowl would continue in growing numbers until the United States entered WWII. The New Deal brought aid to the farmers in the Dust Bowl area but it was too late for many. Even with federal aid, faced with the loss of their homes and farms, the outflow continued. Only with our entry into WWII and the influx of these jobless men into the military were many able to get work. Many of their wives found work in the California defense industry.

WORLD WAR II AND ROUTE 66 IN THE EAST MOJAVE

Bill Pearson, XNGH

After the outbreak of World War II, Route 66 was the main highway through the Zone of the Interior in the northern part of the Army's Desert Training Center. The Zone of the Interior included all of the Inland Empire. It spanned the desert from Pomona and San Bernardino stretching from Spadra to Palm Springs. It contained various military hospitals, ordnance and supply bases and P.O.W. camps. Whereas the troops and their equipment were mainly brought in by train, Route 66 provided connections between camps Clipper, Ibis, Goffs, Needles and the Colorado River. Goffs was a large ordnance dump and the 7th Infantry Division was based behind the Goffs school house. Camp Clipper was the home of the 33rd

Infantry Division and the 93rd Infantry Division. There is some confusion in the literature over the name of Camp Clipper. It was also known as Camp Essex. Everet Hayes of the Bureau of Land Management explains it best, “The locals called it Camp Essex and the military called it Camp Clipper.” Camp Ibis was the home of the 9th and 11th Armored Divisions. This camp had to bring water in by truck from the Colorado River. Camp Needles was more of an administrative camp with an air field, general hospital, and a combat engineer training camp.

CAMP IBIS EAST MOJAVE



THE POSTWAR YEARS AND THE COMING OF THE INTERSTATE

Mike Johnson, Clampatriarch

During World War II, civilian travel over Route 66 dropped off dramatically, primarily due to gas rationing and a shortage of tires. Roadside businesses that had sprung up to serve the needs of travelers had a hard time of it. The highway became a sort of military road, with convoys carrying troops and materiel from base to base. Busloads of servicemen and uniformed hitchhikers were a common sight.

The postwar years, however, marked the real heyday of Route 66. As the production of civilian cars resumed and supplies of gasoline and tires became plentiful once again, the road became crowded with ex-GIs and their families on the move. Roadside businesses prospered once again, and the traffic count exceeded even the great exodus of the Dust Bowl years.

An example of a family on the move was that of Bobby Troup and his wife, Cynthia. Troup was a musician and songwriter from Pennsylvania. After serving in the Marine Corps during the war, Troup decided to come to California to pick up his musical career. Somewhere near St. Louis, Troup's wife made a suggestion that he write a song about the trip, and came up with the phrase "get your kicks on Route 66." He was immediately taken with the idea and began working on a song during the westward journey. Upon reaching Los Angeles, he was able to arrange a meeting with Nat "King" Cole, who also liked the song and recorded it in 1946. "Get Your Kicks on Route 66" was an immediate hit, and over the years became a

classic. Cole often stated that of all the songs he recorded, it was the most requested.

Perhaps partly as a result of the song's success, in 1947 the defunct Highway 66 Association was revived, later changing its name to the Main Street of America Highway Association. The group worked hard to promote the road, dedicating the westernmost portion as the Will Rogers Highway. In the 1950s, Route 66's fame and popularity were at their peak, and thousands of roadside enterprises thrived on the heavy tourist trade.

Chambless, approximately thirteen miles east of Amboy, was typical of such roadside stops. It provided food, gas, and lodging for a steady stream of travelers. Like many of its neighbors along the highway, it has been described as "never really a town, just a shady spot on the desert route." Chambless was the site of Billy Holcomb Chapter's Spring Clampout in 1992, marking the 66th anniversary of the Mother Road, and is graced with a commemorative plaque alongside the roadway.

Amboy also thrived during this period. It is against the background of highway and railroad that Amboy should be viewed. Interviewed around 1990, long-time owner of Amboy, Buster Burris (now deceased) explained its history in his own words:

This spot on the ol' highway, here in Amboy, was as busy as any place in the desert. I should know, I've been working right here since 1938. I was born in Bandera, Texas, but the desert is my home. Highway 66 has moved a little bit over the years, but since about thirty-three, it's been out front of this café and motel. That's where it was when I showed up. My first father-in-law built up the original business. The place is named Roy's, after him. I was only planning on being here for a short time, but that fell by the wayside. I got to where I liked it here and decided to stay. Besides the tourist cabins, I opened a repair shop in 1940, and the café in 1945.

...The heavy highway business started about forty-eight. After the war, my cabins were busy. We kept them rented day and night. Folks pulled over and slept in their cars when they couldn't get a room. That's how busy it was in Amboy. I built the café in order to give people a place to eat. We also carried a tremendous amount of auto parts. We had complete motors for most of the makes. It was hard work, but we could change out a motor in a matter of hours and get the people back on the road and on their way.

From the late 1940s into the early seventies, this place was a madhouse. We kept everything open 24 hours a day. I had 90 people working for me full-time. During the summer, the number of workers would get as high as 120. There were waitresses, mechanics, maids, and cooks coming in here from Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona, and anyplace else in the country we could find them. People were working so hard they'd fall down in bed exhausted and get a few hours sleep and then come right back to it again. I used to think everybody in the world was driving through Amboy.

Then everything changed. The interstate was completed. It was just like somebody put up a gate across Route 66. The traffic just plain stopped. That very first day it went from being almost bumper-to-bumper to about a half-dozen cars coming through here. A few years later, there was a big acid spill up on the interstate and they had to reroute the traffic down the old highway. All of a sudden we were reminded of the way things used to be.

In recent years, business has gotten better—not like the old days but definitely better. Motorcycle groups come through and stop, and tourists on their way to Disneyland who want to get away from the busy interstate. There are the folks on their way to the gambling casinos. They know that there aren't as many state cops on the old road, so they can make better time coming this way. We also have about 35 or 40 geology students and their professors from Colby College all the way back in Waterville, Maine, who come here for one month every year on a field trip. They stay in the motel and take their meals here. They've been doing that for years.

Even in the midst of success, in the 1950s it became clear that the importance of Route 66 was doomed to decline. In 1954, President Eisenhower established an advisory committee to come up with a comprehensive plan for a national highway program. This led to the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which spelled out guidelines for a 42,500 mile interstate highway system. Some

stretches of the old highway were widened to four lanes, but it was obvious that Route 66 could no longer handle the ever-increasing volume of traffic.

The program, planned to take twelve years to complete, actually took twice that long. A piece of Route 66 was replaced by interstate here and there, bypasses were constructed around larger cities, and in many places the old highway was ignominiously reduced to a frontage road.

It eventually took five interstates—55, 44, 40, 15, and 10—to replace Route 66. The final remnant of the route was replaced by a section of Interstate 40 near Williams, Arizona, in 1984, and a year later the official Route 66 designation was dropped.

Amboy was bypassed by Interstate 40 in May of 1973. The old road is still well-maintained, and sees a considerable amount of traffic in this area as a result of its connection via Amboy Road with Twentynine Palms. Amboy is now owned by Mr. Albert Okura, founder of the Juan Pollo restaurant chain, who is our gracious host for this event. He plans to reopen the gas station, café, and motel, and once again make Amboy an important stop for travelers along old Route 66.

GET YOUR KICKS ON ROUTE 66

If you ever plan to motor west

Travel my way, take the highway that's the best

Get your kicks on Route 66

It winds from Chicago to L.A.
More than two thousand miles all the way

Get your kicks on Route 66

Now you go through Saint Looney and Joplin, Missouri

And Oklahoma City is mighty pretty
You'll see Amarillo, Gallup, New Mexico
Flagstaff, Arizona, don't forget Winona
Kingman, Barstow, San Bernardino
Won't you get hip to this timely tip
When you make that California trip

Get your kicks on Route 66

Words and music by Bobby Troup

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DEATH AND REBIRTH

The creation of the Interstate Highway System in 1956 marked the beginning of the end for Route 66. By the mid-fifties it was clear that the largely two-lane road could no longer handle the increased traffic and heavier and faster cars and trucks. More modern four-lane roads built to the standards of the Interstate

Highway system began to replace sections of the Mother Road. At first, rural sections were improved or abandoned; then cities and towns were bypassed. Probably the first to be affected were owners of roadside tourist services. Later, as Interstate 40 bypassed Essex, Chambless, and Amboy, gas stations, motels, and cafes were forced to close their doors:

Business owners along the route usually remember the exact time of day the Interstate opened around their towns. Most compare the experience to the closing of a water faucet. One day hundreds of cars passed in front of their businesses; the next day only a dozen or so might pass. Businesses struggled, but most eventually failed, and by the late 1970s most of the route had been replaced. On October 13, 1984, Williams, Arizona became the last town along Route 66 to succumb, and in 1985 the fabled U.S. Highway 66 was officially decommissioned and all remaining signage removed (Olsen 2004).

The story does not end here, however. Americans have a love for their past, and the nostalgia for Route 66 is no exception. Not long after the decommissioning of the Mother Road, Americans started to turn off the busy Interstate and take a step back in time to a slower pace. Some of today's travelers are graying baby-boomers who want to relive past adventures, or want to share with their children the excitement of traveling the old road. Many others want to explore the abandoned towns and oases to get an understanding of what life was like in another time. While many businesses and towns along the route are long closed, some still survive. Roy's Café in Amboy is one such place. Roy's has changed hands more than once in the past ten years and for a time its future, and that of Amboy, was in doubt. Fortunately, though, Mr. Albert Okura purchased the town, along with its famous café, in April 2005. He plans to reopen the café, and eventually the service

station, as an icon of Route 66 history. Route 66 offers a path to the past, and for many is still the preferred route through the East Mojave Desert.

STOPS ALONG THE WAY

AMBOY TO GOFFS

Amboy



Another siding along the Southern Pacific, Amboy was established in 1883. By the time Route 66 was officially designated, Amboy consisted of a railroad depot, several garages, and a couple of stores. (Metcalf-Shaw, 1926) By the late 1930's, its population was nearly 100. Roy's Café, opened about 1938 by Roy Crowl and later owned and operated by Buster Burris, became an icon along Route 66 through the Mojave Desert. Amboy reached its height after World War II, when its

population reached 264 souls and Amboy boasted two cafes, a motel, tourist cabins, and two gas stations. Many buildings remain today, including two section houses (ca. 1900), three cottages from a highway maintenance facility (late 1940s), the Amboy schoolhouse (1903), Roy's Café (1947), Roy's Motel office (ca. early 1950s), several cottages from Roy's Motel (ca. early 1950s), a Catholic Church (ca. early 1950s), and highway maintenance buildings (ca. 1970) (Bischoff, 2006). Amboy is currently owned by Albert Okura, who plans on restoring the town by reopening Roy's Café and the service station.

Chambless



James Albert Chambless of Arkansas established a homestead at an intersection of a mining road with the National Trails Road in the early 1920's. The Automobile Club of Southern California reported a store in this location in the late 1920's, after the road was designated as part of Route 66. In 1932 the highway was realigned, and the business followed it; a gas station, motel and store were added, and by 1939 a post office, tourist cabins, and a café were operating here. During

World War II, the Army used a portion of the desert across the road from Chambless for an artillery range (Bischoff 2006). Today the businesses have closed, but many of the buildings, including the store and tourist cabins, remain.

Cadiz Summit



By the late 1930's, a gas station, café, and tourist cabins were located at the low pass east of Chambless known as Cadiz summit. This oasis was known as Summit, and sometime prior to 1931 a beacon was built on top of the nearby hill. At some point the café burned down. Foundations of the café and garage as well as a stone retaining wall still remain on the north side of the highway, and the foundations of the beacon are located on top of the hill. From the summit, old alignments of the highway can be seen north and south of the road; this section was straightened in the early 1930's.

Danby



Originally a railroad siding for the Southern Pacific, Danby was established in 1883. Danby was a shipping point for salt extracted from the nearby dry lake. By 1900 Danby contained a mill, two wells, a store, and a group of cabins (Bischoff, 2006). Later, when Route 66 was realigned in 1932, Danby moved from its original location along the railroad north to the highway. A small group of tourist cabins and a service station were in operation late in the 1930s. A small county courthouse was built there to serve the Amboy Judicial District for the County of San Bernardino. The first courthouse was replaced in the 1950's by a larger structure, which can be seen today. About seven buildings still stand at Danby (the one along the highway), including the courthouse, two garages, a residence, and a few storage sheds.

Essex



Originally called Edson, Essex was established as a siding on the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1883. The name was changed to Essex in 1906 (Bischoff, 2006). A highway maintenance facility was constructed in about 1924. T.G. Blythe homesteaded on land near the siding and opened a service station in 1927. The realignment of Route 66 that bypassed Fenner and Goffs meant well for Essex, as it became the last stop of significance before Needles. Additionally, the road to Mitchell Caverns intersected with Route 66 in Essex. A school, store, and post office were operating by the 1930's. Many buildings and a few residents remain at Essex today. There are two gas stations, representing two periods of Essex history. A combination well and water fountain, built by the California Highway Department, can be seen at the west end of town on the current highway (Bischoff, 2006).

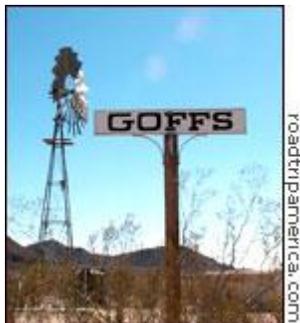
In 1977, Essex gained its fifteen minutes of fame when the town's residents (about 35 in number), wrote the Los Angeles Times claiming to be the only town in America without television. The whole population of the town was invited to

appear on the Johnny Carson Show, and a manufacturer who saw the show donated the equipment necessary to bring television to Essex (Moore and Cunningham, 2003).

Fenner

Fenner had its beginnings in 1883 as a railroad construction camp. It was also a railroad station for the nearby town of Providence. Fenner gained in importance in the late 1890's as a shipping point for local mines, and boasted a boarding house, saloon, post office, blacksmith shop, horse corral and feed yard, section house, telegraph office, and pumping station (Bischoff, 2006). By the late 1920's, the town had a store, hotel, café, and service station to take advantage of the new highway traffic (Bard, 1972). Fenner was bypassed in 1932 with the new alignment of Route 66. Today, little remains of the original town of Fenner; there is a gas station and store just to the west of the town site.

Goffs



Goffs was a siding built by the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1883. Named for a railroad official, Goffs was located at the highest point between Needles and Amboy. At first, Goffs was merely a turning around point for helper engines that assisted in pulling trains up the grade from Needles. However, the Nevada

Southern Railroad was constructed north from Goffs in 1893 from the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad (which would become the Santa Fe). The Nevada Southern served the mines in the New York Mountains to the north, and was eventually extended to the mining town of Searchlight Nevada.

By the time the Nevada Southern (later the California Eastern) ceased operation in 1923, traffic along the National Trails Road, and in 1926 Route 66, was beginning to increase. Business was good until 1932 when Route 66 was realigned to the south, bypassing Goffs. The post office closed in 1932, as did many businesses that depended on the highway traffic. The Goffs School closed in 1938. Today, the Goffs school house is the center piece of the Friends of the Mojave Road and the Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association.

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