

America's Highway

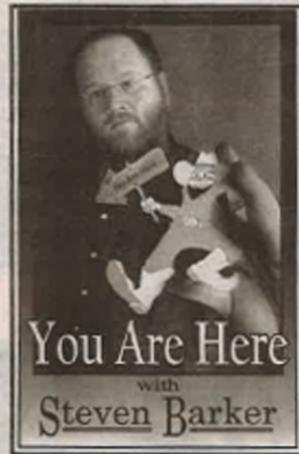


At the corner of what's now North Jefferson and East 14th Streets, the Goates Motor Courts was one of two stops offering cabins for travelers on The Broadway of America, the nation's first designated transcontinental highway.

Facebook posting ignites cyberspace review of early Mt Pleasant motor courts

Posted by Lisa Goates Torrez on August 3rd on Facebook's group, Mt. Pleasant--Memory Lane, a statement accompanied an old photo, "My great-great uncle James Henry Goates owned this store." Titus County hosted two motor courts on America's first transcontinental highway, although briefly. In the mid 1930's, these routes were changed to Highway 67, effectively isolating both.

It is a southern tradition, and a skill refined by practice, to tell a story. Facebook provides, with a single posting of an old photo, a flood of memories for some, stories that smack of legend to the younger generations. The Goates Court, the El Moro



Court and its huge swimming pool, their place in Titus County in relation to Highway 1... all razed, replaced, or rerouted. History is prone to repeat itself. Not all of that repetition is negative, but piecing together these stories

into an understanding of the past seems to create more questions than are resolved.

According to Joe Defazio in "Preserving Texas History - The Bankhead Highway" from Ancestry.com, the Good Roads Movement, spearheaded by Senator John Hollis Bankhead from Alabama, provided the industrial and political backing, while New Deal legislation provided the infrastructure and official legislation for the highway to become the first marked transcontinental highway, stretching from Washington DC to San Diego, which came through Titus County. "By the 1920's, every town's

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Mary Turner worked with her late husband, Robert, in creating *titushistory.com*. Years of pains-taking research provide excellent documentation for Mr. Turner's account of El Moro Motor Courts and Spring Beach.

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Main Street stretched from sea to sea," Defazio said. "Capacity issues eventually doomed the famous highway. Two-lane roads were not designated to handle the increased traffic in postwar America of the 1940's and 50's. As traffic decreased, so did the commerce it brought to many towns across the country. Businesses closed and people moved to more populous areas with greater opportunities for careers and progress."

With the passage of Eisenhower's Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, this changed everything through the increased traffic and ef-

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ficient pace of the new interstates. Dotting the exits of these fast-moving rivers of asphalt and concrete are reminders of the motor courts. The roadside Inn, convenience stores and fast food drive-troughs have replaced

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Spring Beach Pool at El Moro Motor Court

Ad copy from August 3, 1937 *Mt Pleasant Daily Times*

El Moro Court is providing a distinct asset to the people of Mt. Pleasant during these hot days and evenings, and the manager, E. L. Roofe, reports that many local citizens drive out every day to take a dip in the cool, refreshing water of the swimming pool.

The water comes from a well over 500 feet deep, which flows into the pool in large quantities, both day and night. In order to ensure absolute immunity from germs of any kind, the pool is given a treatment of chlorine every day, and daily tests are made to guard the public, and no one should have the least apprehension about the purity of this water.

Mr. Roofe has had many compliments from tourists concerning his swimming pool, because of the cool, refreshing quantities of the deep well water, and the modern facilities of the entire court. He announces that at the close of the present season, the old bath houses will be torn down, and next spring will be replaced with new ones of the latest design.



From its concrete wading pool to its vast open swimming area, a 500-foot well and pumping system fed 'waterfalls' spilling into Spring Beach Pool.

(Motor Court, from page 15) the motor court, the mom-and-pop groceries and the cafes serving 'home-cooked meals'. The definition of comfort has changed over time in much the same way as luxury has changed. Swimming Pools were so luxurious in the early-to-mid 1900's

that just having a swimming pool in town was a rarity, and brought with it the title of 'the place to be,' in patronage if not in title.

Several miles outside of town, on FM-899, an almost-forgotten Olympic sized swimming pool is a monument to one of the hot-spots

in Titus County from the 1930's; when Highway 1, the old Bankhead Highway, ran across the entire width of the state from Texarkana to El Paso. The highway is described in a 1922 tourist guide as "the principal trans-continental artery for mo-

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Built in 1930, The El Moro Motor Court flourished on the "Old Dallas Highway" until U.S. 1 was re-routed to what's now U.S. 67 in the mid 1930's. In the mid 40's the house, six cabins and Spring Beach pool were sold to a doctor who set up his practice there.

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tor traffic across the United States," also colloquially known as the Broadway of America. In the same way the motor court provided a place of lodging, food, and other conveniences, the swimming pool offered a focal point, a gathering place to socialize; a luxury that was beyond what could be found at home. Once thriving, and the place to be, this now-abandoned pool marks the site of the Spring Beach Swimming Pool. Like the Goates Court, the El Moro answered the need for shelter and board to travelers.

Green Title's Sandy Agan provided photocopies of the deed filed in May of 1930 (originally signed on September 23, 1929, according to Mr Turner's diligent research) arranging the sale of 5.24 acres of land about 3 miles outside Mt Pleasant for the sum of one thousand dollars, as A. P. Williams sold his land to E. L. Roofe. The El Moro was born. Further documents pro-

Mr Roofe, even went so far as to place a sign on his property adjacent to the railroad tracks advertising the cab service available in order to bring the passengers directly from the depot in town to the comfort of the El Moro Court.

vided by Mrs Agan include a contract filed June 21, 1930, where Mr Roofe hired a Mr F. R. Berry (not surprising as Mr Berry's son boasted in the March 2005 edition of the East Texas Journal, "whatever there was to do with concrete, [he] did it.") to stucco some "570 sq yards (more or less)," which is followed in short order on January 2, 1931 with a settlement between Mr Roofe and Mr Berry, where the stucco was claimed to be "defective and [Mr Roofe] is claiming damages therefore against the said F.E. Berry." By May of

1931, Mr Roofe was working with a new contractor, Mr P. T. Wray, to install a bathroom adjacent to the pool which was publicly announced in March 1931.

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searching for backstory on the El Moro court, aside from photocopies of the 1930's deed of sale for the property, the leading authority on the El Moro is the late Robert Turner's website, www.titushistory.com.

Reading advertisements from the August 3, 1937 edition of the Mt Pleasant Daily Times, the repetition of such words as "sanitary", "pure", and more specifically the phrase "In order to insure absolute immunity from germs of any kind, the pool is given a treatment of chlorine every day, and daily tests are made to guard the public, and no one should have the least apprehension about the purity of this water."

A 1944 Mt Pleasant Daily Times real estate listing offers the El Moro Court, the 5.24 acres of land, a seven room house, six cabins, the concrete bathing pool, a 500-foot well, a poultry barn, yard, etc, for sale. The Daily Times later posts, on September 18, 1945, the Buckner Chiropractic Clinic has moved in to the El Moro Court. Notable from this post is the address: Route 2, Old Dallas Highway. The

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river of highways shifted paths with the New Deal's rerouting, reconstruction, and renaming of the major American roadways.

Recalling a snippet of the Facebook posts previously mentioned, on August 9th, Danny Walker posts, "...the pool was closed due to concerns about polio." Ah ha! Another puzzle piece falls into place and the picture makes much more sense. The combined loss of business

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from the shift of major roadways, paired with the justified or unjustified fears of the public over contamination of what was the most feared and misunderstood disease epidemic of the time, the El Moro faced significant adversity.

The Spring Beach Swimming Pool's fate was sealed

when a woman was found dead in the deep side of the pool. Other tales tell of one of three boys who drowned in play. The stories stay similar, but each holds its own specific details and characters with the embellishment of each retelling. Whoever may have died that day, the fact is the pool never reopened; and with the sale posted, the

Spring Beach Swimming Pool became an unofficial memorial to this passing.

The way a river establishes the boundaries of the states, so does the highway system and the conditions of the environment and the politics of the day, shape the economies of the towns in the state. After such a parched summer I am further remind-

ed, as I read through the history of the Goates Court, the El Moro, and the historical Highway 1, that roadways not only change course over the passage of decades, but the riverbeds can also dry up when the flow changes paths. The empty Olympic-sized swimming pool that still is visible on FM-899 is all too similar to the dried-up ponds

spotting the landscape in every pasture and acreage after such a long, rainless summer. What was luxury in the past is a monument to the shifting tide of time. In a time of need, these monuments to abandoned luxury provide a definitive moral to this story. There will always be drought and there will be struggles, but this too shall pass.