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...” (See Motor Court, page 15)
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.

(Motor Court, from page 3)

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 efficient 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-toughs have replaced (See Motor Court, page 16)
Spring Beach Pool
at El Moro Motor Court

E l 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.

(See Motor Court, page 17)
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.

(Motor Court, from page 16)

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.

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 provided 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.

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.

(See Motor Court, page 18)
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.ti-
tushistory.com.

Reading advertisements
from the August 3, 1937 edi-
tion of the Mt Pleasant Daily
Times, the repetition of such
words as "sanitary", "pure",
and more specifically the
phrase "In order to insure abso-
olute 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 con-
tcrete bathing pool, a 500-foot
well, a poultry barn, yard,
etc., for sale. The Daily Times
later posts, on September 18,
1945, the Buckner Chiroprac-
tic 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
erouting, 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 con-
cerns about polio." Ah ha!
Another puzzle piece falls
into place and the picture
makes much more sense. The
combined loss of business

(See Motor Court, page 19)
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 reminded, 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.