

***Moose Crossing: Portland to Portland on the Theodore Roosevelt International Highway***

Max J. Skidmore  
Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, 2007  
239 pages, 6.8 x 9.8 inches, black and white photographs, \$38 softcover

Reviewed by Douglas Towne

Max Skidmore's chance encounter in 1996, high atop the Continental Divide in Montana, was the catalyst behind his 4,060-mile quest to research and publicize an almost forgotten highway spanning North America named for a former president who is more famous for another route—his charge up San Juan Hill.

When Skidmore, a long-time SCA member, happened upon with a 60-foot stone obelisk heralding the completion of the Theodore Roosevelt International Highway (TRIH) near Glacier National Park, it was a figurative perfect storm.

A political science professor at the University of Missouri at Kansas City with a love of the roadside and a penchant for Teddy Roosevelt or TR, he was previously unaware of this historic auto route that is the largest memorial to the man who Skidmore calls "without doubt was the most dynamic President in American History." Over the ensuing years, Skidmore's merging interests would influence him to exhaustively investigate the history of the TRIH and eventually drive the highway coast-to-coast. This research resulted in a *SCA Journal* article (Spring 1999) and culminated in the book, *Moose Crossing*.

The TRIH was commissioned in 1919 to honor the memory of the recent passing of the 26th president. It's the northernmost of nine trails that were—or aspired to be—transcontinental in the 1920s. Traversing a dozen states to connect Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon, the highway's international designation is earned from its segment through Ontario, Canada. Although not as famous as other named routes, the TRIH afforded drivers an array of scenic wonders such as New England forests, Niagara Falls, the Great Lakes, the Rocky Mountains and the Columbia River Gorge while passing through cities such as Burlington, Rochester, Detroit, Duluth, and Spokane.

Skidmore's journey starts in Maine and continues westward, state-by-state, until he encounters the Pacific Ocean. Along the way, he combs the roadside for remnants

of the TRIH and interviews people ranging from local historians to newspaper editors to café patrons, searching for information about the highway. But vestiges of the TRIH are few, and the people he chats with are often unaware this once-famous highway is located nearby—sometimes right outside their front door. Skidmore does locate a few individuals along the way who have heard of the TRIH and, tantalizingly, seem to recollect where there is some faded highway marker. These promising leads, however, don't materialize. Despite these let downs, the author's enthusiasm for his mission never ebbs.

In the absence of an abundance of striking roadside artifacts, *Moose Crossing* is more a town-by-town travelogue of Skidmore's journey across the TRIH. The book's strength—not surprisingly—is the perspective the author provides on political history, regional geography and popular culture. Whether writing about history or trivia, Skidmore's sharp eye and research skills make for an informative and entertaining book. Who knew that Vermont sought to

become a Canadian province after being blocked from becoming the 14th state, that Frank Woolworth's retail empire started in Watertown, New York, when he set up a table at a local fair bearing the sign, "Any Article For 5 Cents," that Cream of Wheat cereal was invented in Grand Forks, North Dakota, or that TR became a black belt in jiu-jitsu during his presidency?

My issues with the book are few. The black and white photographs are dark and not particularly captivating but still manage to serve the publication well—this is by no means a coffee table book. Personally, I would have liked to see the author incorporate more about TR in the book (most is tucked away in an appendix) such as a quote to start each chapter,

as it provides an appealing glimpse into this legendary figure. Finally, the town-by-town format is detailed and certainly useful to anyone retracing parts of the TRIH. But I personally enjoyed—more than his interviews and road diary—Skidmore's reflections that often illuminated some of the nuances of each state the highway passed through. Perhaps Skidmore will reward us someday with another book that expands upon these mini-essays.

Staying power is tough to predict; while some things

related to TR, such as the Teddy Bear, retain much of their popularity, the TRIH has not been so fortunate. Roadside enthusiasts are lucky that such a talented and dogged patron as Skidmore was inspired to write an excellent history of this important early auto route. So as Theodore Roosevelt's granddaughter, Edith Roosevelt Derby Williams, says in the foreword to *Moose Crossing*, and as TR himself likely would have commented, "A bully job, Max Skidmore, and I salute you!"

Douglas Towne's first encounter with the TRIH was in 1986 at Alexandria Bay, New York, where he enjoyed a Thousand Islands boat tour and the French Festival in nearby Cape Vincent during an indelible visit to upstate New York.

***The Ghosts of Jungle Park: History, Myth and Legend: The Story of a Place Like No Other***

By Tom W. Williams  
Temperance, Michigan: Woodangett Press, 2007  
314 pages, 6 x 9 inches, B & W illustrations, \$40 hardcover  
Available from the author via thewilliams12@aol.com

Reviewed by Keith A. Sculle

Imagine a gentle bend in a rural state highway descending onto a bridge over a creek through western Indiana. There, a side road slopes down about 25 feet off the highway to Sugar Mill Creek's floodplain. A canoe rental sign points travelers toward a huge billboard—on second thought the backside of an enclosed and covered grandstand—and further down the slope off the highway to an elaborately arched gate of wooden slats with the name "Jungle Park" painted above. What is this—a zoo or an amusement park surrounded by miles and miles of farmland? How unlikely! Further up the highway, travelers pass a cluster of derelict cabins, a repair garage, and a store with a windmill motif atop as they drive up and out of the valley back onto the farmland flats.

That's the public view by the road today, 56 miles west of Indianapolis on Indiana Highway 41. Readers of the book reviewed here will learn that the assemblage had been a dirt track for sprint racing with adjacent cabins (and hotel, until it burned in 2005), restaurant, and gas station. What an unexpected interruption of the pastoral Hoosier scene it remains. Who would guess that an author could rely on a network of Jungle Park founders' descendants and fans,

many of whom congregate each fall at a reunion on-site, to draw on a vast collection of their personal memorabilia in addition to the standard research in newspapers for this self-published (1,000 copies) nugget of racing history with a strong commercial archeology component. Tom Williams has done just that.

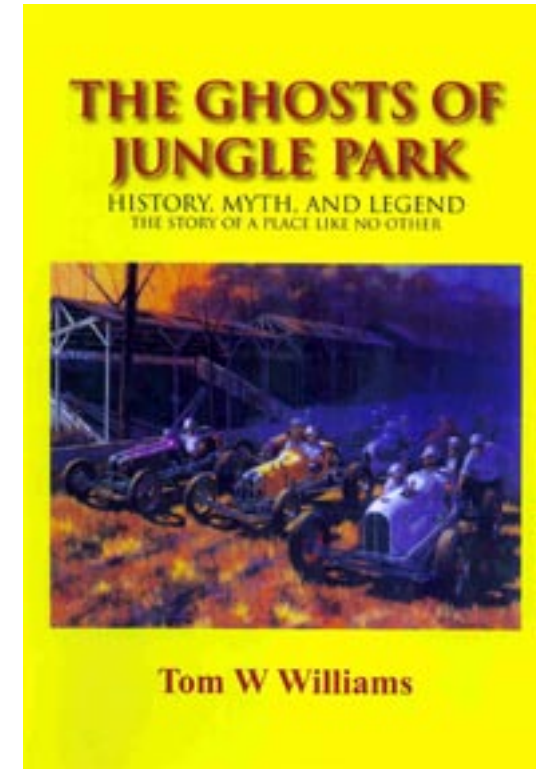
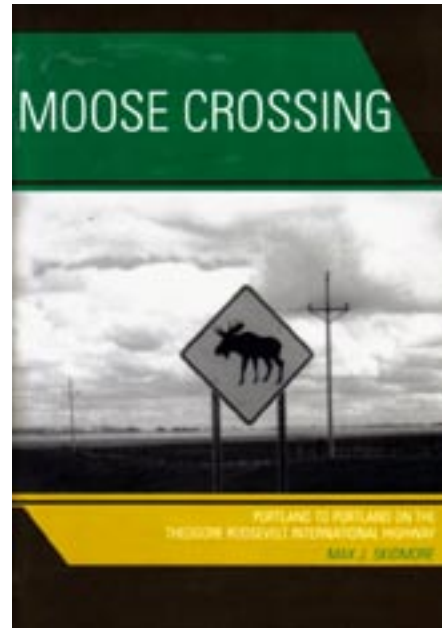
The curiously named Jungle Park was the creation of Earl Padgett, born a local farm boy who then became a successful businessman, first by inventing and selling his auto headlamps but wanted a park, for which something like "Cornfield Speedway" just wouldn't have triggered fans. Padgett perfectly gauged people's interests; his creation was immensely popular from its inception in 1926. Purses ranged as high as \$1,000 and many top-name drivers pursued them. Top attendance figures of 5,000 to 6,000 were not uncommon at single events through the racing season each spring, summer, and fall and traffic jammed the highway from mid-morning on race days.

Williams very convincingly recaptures the scene. Anchored by a "squashed oval" nearly one-half-mile around that was less than 20 feet from the highway on the west curve and 55 feet from Sugar Creek on the backstretch, attendees crowded the grandstand and infield. At least for the first audiences, "the roaring of racing engines, the smells of exhaust smoke and castor oil, and the closeness of the large, noisy crowd combined to provide a carnival-like atmosphere that must have excited the senses beyond anything experienced before." (p. ix) From inside the

cockpit, reported by one of the few drivers who described the challenging course, "it had a short turn with a steep bank as it turned left at the highway, then up a hill with a long curve to the finish line, then down hill and another short curve to the creek bottom where it was level and a short curve back to the highway short curve." (pp. 35-36). This is known in racing, Williams informs readers, as a "handling" track, where the driver's skill in keeping the car on the exact path he wanted trumped horsepower.

Jungle Park was not only an amusement venue. It was deadly too. Two years after the course opened, the first driver was killed, perhaps the category of victim most easily understandable. Six would die over the track's duration. The first two victims, however, were the first track manager and a fan. Earl Parker was filling a rut on the track's east curve while several cars were qualifying when he was hit and, two and one-

half hours later, died of a fractured skull at a nearby hospital. Early fans everywhere so routinely ran onto courses with events in progress that they were the subject of editorial



admonition. Distressed drivers in their overturned cars were also the beneficiaries of fans who took strategic positions on the infield at Jungle Park in order to rush out and help, as Williams learned from the fan who probably saw the most races there. Mrs. Charles Kiger, on the other hand, simply ran onto the track unmindful of the fact that the last cars in a race had yet to complete their final lap, when she was hit and killed instantly in Jungle Park's second season.

More than anxious fans and drivers generated the bustling scene. Peddlers sold from their car trunks whatever local fruits, vegetables, or nuts were in season. Among those finagling "free seats" were spectators who sat and drank across from Padgett's property on the banks of Sugar Creek. The nine-room hotel up from the race course set a respectable tone appropriate for a summer resort where travelers between races as well as fans and drivers stayed. One of the boys who worked there recalled the entrance had a fireplace with nice chairs and couches and down the hall was a library with newspapers and novels. Not only the laundry and kitchen occupied the downstairs but a large room for parties, dances, relaxation, reading, or chatting. About 50 yards in front of the hotel and immediately beside the highway were situated three stylish cabins under a single roof. The restaurant was popular throughout the site's working life. But it was the track that garnered national attention due to the reputation of the entrants; many of them also raced at the big tracks.

Jungle Park reached its heyday in the late 1930s and early '40s, then closed after the 1960 season, a victim of changed circumstances. Rival race courses became easier to get in and out of, were cleaner, and more numerous in the booming consumer culture after the two-year hiatus during World War II (1943-1944). That culture also generated other entertainment options. Attendance declined and so did the track itself, although new local owners took measures to try to keep it viable. In 1946, they acquired the property with the hotel, cabins, and restaurant adjacent to the park and, in 1950, built a new track inside the old one. Following a four-year suspension of events (1956-1959), the penultimate race went unreported in the press and the finale was punctuated by a crash killing one spectator, injuring several others, and the driver suffering a severe concussion. Perhaps understandably, no one seems to remember who won that race. Other new owners opened a new gas station and garage while managing the restaurant until 1992. Given such strong memories, readers turn with little surprise to an afterword about the reunions which began in 2003.

Williams has composed a lively account. He suffuses the narrative with first-person accounts, including anecdotes and amusing and bittersweet remembrances, drawn from oral history, and, displayed as reinforcing sidebars, newspaper columns and notices detailing events mentioned briefly in the text. The many historic and recent photographs induce the sense of a past living in the present instant of reading. Williams satisfies his subtitle's promise of history, myth, and legend; readers, for example, will learn of innumerable great

and daring drivers and discount the tales of gangsters and other criminals who were thought to patronize the hotel and restaurant in the 1930s. In one chapter especially fascinating for commercial archeologists, he traces the drivers' lives on the road and doesn't fail to record discrimination against an African American driver seeking a motel room in nearby Terre Haute, Indiana. Absent footnotes, bibliography, and index, readers nonetheless have an apparently reliable and definitely an enjoyable chronicle.

One of Indiana's finest living writers observed, "Those of us who live in unspectacular landscapes—like Indiana, or for that matter like most of the Midwest—landscapes without mountains or canyons, without towering waterfalls or stony coastlines—may be especially prone to lose our sense of awe." On the contrary, the roadside of man-made attractions often rewards the curious as it did the author of the *Ghosts of Jungle Park* and will his readers.

Keith A. Sculle contributes frequently to the *Society for Commercial Archeology Journal* and has co-authored six books about related subjects, most recently *Motoring: The Highway Experience in America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

### *Hip to the Trip, A Cultural History of Route 66*

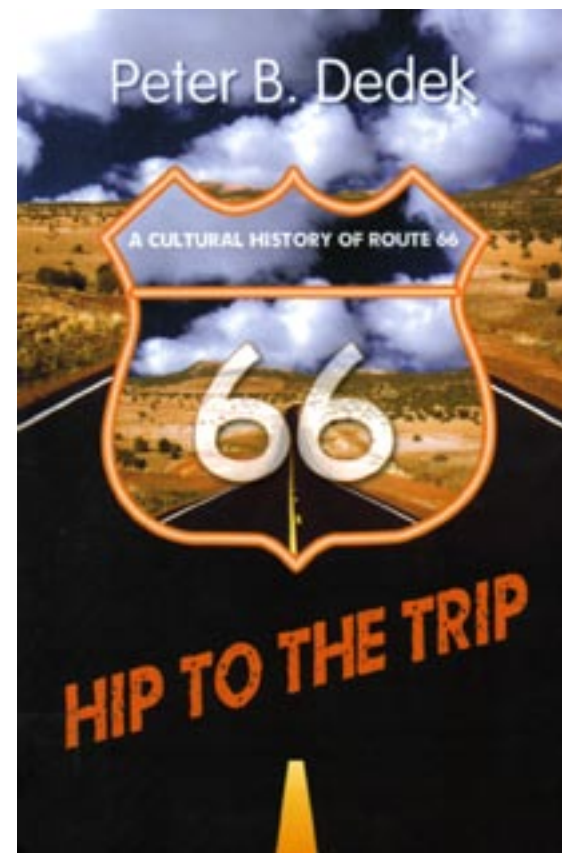
By Peter B. Dedek

Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007  
169 pp., \$19.95 paper

Reviewed by Arthur Krim

Route 66 continues to offer revealing insights on the history of the American highway. A recent book by Peter B. Dedek adds yet another layer of scholarship to the growing shelf of roadside studies on the Mother Road. Dedek's acumen comes from his background with the Texas Historical Commission on the Route 66 Corridor Project of 2001 and his familiarity with the Southwest as a tourist destination. *Hip to the Trip* is focused directly upon the cultural history of Route 66 in Arizona and New Mexico with local photos of familiar landmarks such as the Twin Arrows and Apache Motel.

The book is divided into five chapters which trace the pre-history, history, and post-history of Route 66 from the early Santa Fe Railroad tourist era to the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Project. The most valuable chapters are those dealing with the prehistoric and posthistoric period of Route 66 in the tourist corridor of the Southwest. Chapter One treats the Santa Fe Railroad as the template from which the auto tourist development of Route 66 based its vitality. The sequence of exotic Indian and Spanish sights, the Fred Harvey theme hotels and desert destinations such as the Grand Canyon set the Southwest tourist vocabulary that, by 1900, would be appropriated and expanded in the auto era. Dedek uses period postcards and advertisements to



illustrate his point and makes a convincing case that the Santa Fe advertising campaign for trackside tourist stops in Arizona and New Mexico established the Pueblo style for Route 66 motels and cafes.

Chapter Two offers a brief history of classic Route 66 names and dates, from Cyrus Avery to John Steinbeck and Bobby Troup. Dedek uses available sources and standard accounts to relay the development of Highway 66 into Route 66 after the Second World War. He draws upon the work of Michael Wallis and Susan Kelley for the basic history, and relies heavily on the David Kammer National Register study of Route 66 *Across New Mexico* (1993) for much of the detail and insights.

The third chapter on "The Fall and Rise of Route 66" presents the thesis that the nostalgia for the highway is founded on conservative American values of longing for the postwar prosperity of the 1950s. Articles in *Route 66 Magazine* are offered as evidence of the reactionary affection for Route 66 that developed in the 1990s among devotees of the historical highway. Dedek also offers the Beat Generation's nostalgic voice, along with the biker hot rod culture, as rebel voices of the postwar period. Both now combine in the nostalgic aura of Route 66 culture for Fifties Fun Run festivals and off-road exploration of the Southwest.

Chapter Four offers the most innovative insights of the book, a discussion of "Postmodern Nostalgia." Dedek believes that the outpouring of Route 66 nostalgia following the decommissioning of the highway in 1985 has encompassed the reactionary aesthetic against Bauhaus

Modernism of the postwar period. Here, the Interstate Highway Program, with its functional designs and standardized franchise chains, provided a base from which nostalgic appreciation of the folk vernacular and two lane back roads could be explored by highway tourists seeking the authentic American experience. This understanding of post-historic Route 66 nostalgia helps explain the rising commercial industry associated with classic cars, Pueblo motels, and small town centers that provides an alternate universe to the suburban sprawl of big box retail strips. In the final analysis, Dedek presents Route 66 as a democratic highway as opposed to the authoritarian elitism of the primary Interstates such as I-40.

The final chapter outlines the current state of preservation planning and projection since the establishment of the Route 66 Corridor Act in 1999. Dedek details a wide variety of successful preservation projects from Illinois to Texas such as the U Drop Inn and the Blue Swallow Motel, in contrast to the losses of the Club Café and Coral Court Motel, all familiar to SCA members. The details of the grant program and the development of state-by-state corridor studies are given in almost random fashion, though Dedek does offer a database of successful National Register of Historic Places statewide listings that reveals Oklahoma and Arizona as among the most active of the Route 66 corridor projects.

Dedek has written a standard history in a straightforward style of observation, often in continual circles of repeated examples. A few illustrations are offered of familiar Route 66 roadside images, including some in color. The book could have included a working database for a review of the Route 66 Corridor Project, especially since it is set to expire in 2009. *Hip to the Trip* is worth investment for its Postmodern insights on Route 66 nostalgia and its increasing value to the preservation of the highway. Dedek offers a handbook of Route 66 nostalgia and a valued intellectual base for the continuing commercial recreation of roadside history. ●

Arthur Krim is a founding member of SCA and served as a board member from 1977-1996. He teaches Historic Preservation at Boston Architectural College and is a survey consultant to the Massachusetts Historical Commission.