

Book Reviews

Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945, by Warren James Belasco. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1979. pp. xi, 212. Photographs, bibliographical guide, index. \$14.95.

During the early twentieth century more and more Americans not only acquired automobiles, but took to the road as tourists and cross-country travelers. Warren Belasco's account of the evolution of the modern motel chronicles a progression of economic and social attitudes culminating in the post-World War II rise of the franchised chain. Yet the Holiday Inn concept did not spring from the mind of Kemmons Wilson like Venus from the head of Zeus. Rather, the modern motel had its origin in a romantic past of rambling and roughing it.

Gypsies, as the first tourists were called, like their namesakes chose to flop, bag and baggage, where the spirit led them. Soon, however, such uncontrolled hedonistic abandon brought cries of protest from outraged citizens, their gardens plundered and yards littered by these vacationing nomads. Social control won out, and municipalities began to develop free auto camps. Gradually, the forces of morality, economics, and public health moved in, resulting in inspections, permits, licensing, fees, and inevitably in the construction of cabins, courts, and cozy cottages.

Along with the rise of the motor court came the decline of the hotel and the use of railroads, signifying not only a changing preference among Americans for more informal, less systematized leisure time, but a change in patterns of sales and distribution as well. While the old commercial hotels had catered mainly to men/commercial travelers, motels recognized women as a viable force in determining where a touring family might spend the night. Such a difference of perspective was reflected not only in the window-box/gingham curtain style of cottage decoration, but in the management of most motor courts by a husband-wife team.

Using primarily trade and travel literature, Belasco's account is thoroughly researched and documented. An added bonus is its readability and generous illustration with period photographs. MIT Press should be complimented on its excellent design of the volume (though one wishes they had used a different jacket photo than that used for Peter Schmitt's *Back to Nature*).

Having the somewhat unusual hobby of collecting postcards of 1920s through 1940s motor courts, I wondered why Belasco did not discuss the photo postcard both as an advertising technique and as a source of visual documentation for the varieties of court architecture and inte-

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rior design. Indeed, architecture is generally slighted, and I, for one, am still dying to know who designed the Wigwam Village in Bardstown, Kentucky or where the architectural records for that and the thousands of other courts throughout the land have found their final resting place.

Likewise, there is insufficient differentiation in the book between accommodation patterns in various parts of the country. For example, no mention is made of racial segregation in either proprietorship or use of courts in the South and elsewhere. It would have been useful to trace, using city directories, the decline of hotels and growth of camps and motels in some sample communities. These are suggestions for further study, and it is a credit to Belasco that his book stimulated so many ideas in this reader. May it do so as well in others.

Nancy Sahli
National Historical Publications
and Records Commission
Washington, DC

Book Notices

The University of Iowa and Biochemistry. By Clarence P. Berg. (Iowa City: The University of Iowa, 1980. pp. xi, 173, illustrations, bibliography, appendices, \$25.00.)

Clarence P. Berg, professor emeritus of biochemistry at the University of Iowa, has spent many years researching and writing this book since his retirement in 1968. He came to the university from the University of Illinois in 1929 and taught for the next thirty-nine years. This book is an excellent synthesis of material and is much more than a history of the Department of Biochemistry. It is as much a history of

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