State Historical Society of Missouri Collecting Material for Route 66 Centennial

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLUMBIA, Sept. 21, 2022 – U.S. Highway 66, fondly called “Route 66” or “The Mother Road,” is celebrating its centennial in 2026. To prepare for the iconic road’s 100th anniversary, the State Historical Society of Missouri is launching a Route 66 collecting initiative focused on preserving the road’s history within the state. Examples of items the Society seeks to collect include photographs, postcards, film and home videos along the route, records of roadside businesses, oral histories of people who traveled or worked along the road, small souvenirs or artifacts, artwork, and architectural drawings of iconic structures and places.

“We’re very interested in stories and materials ranging from the road’s origins to its peak period in Missouri (circa 1926-1960) to its decline following the rise of the Interstation Highway system,” said Kathleen Seale, coordinator of the State Historical Society’s Rolla and Springfield Research Centers.

Missouri is where Route 66’s name became official, as the highway received its number assignment via a telegram sent April 30, 1926, from Springfield. A gathering there of the proposed highway’s supporters that included Cyrus Avery, the Oklahoma highway commissioner now widely known as the “Father of Route 66,” and John T. Woodruff, a Springfield attorney and business owner who was Missouri’s leading proponent of highway development.

“Supporters had lobbied hard for the number 60 to be assigned to the new highway as roads ending in the number “0” were being reserved for the most important transcontinental routes,” said Seale. “Failing to get Route 60, the Springfield group rejected other proposed numbers and instead chose 66 in the telegram.”

Route 66 played a significant role in the nation’s transportation history as the main artery connecting Chicago to Los Angeles by the late 1920s. In Missouri, the highway followed earlier trails, dirt tracks and gravel roads from the Mississippi River at St. Louis to the Kansas border west of Joplin. Motels, restaurants, gas stations, and roadside attractions thrived on the steady commerce from travelers along Route 66.

Anyone with questions or would like to donate to the Route 66 in Missouri collection can contact the State Historical Society of Missouri. A donation form on the SHSMO website is available to download: shsмо.org/support/materials.

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Photo captions:
#1 “America’s Main Street U.S. 66” postcard collection, State Historical Society of Missouri.


#3 Intersection of U.S. Highway 66 and Route 19, Rolla, circa 1950s, State Historical Society of Missouri.

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