

meaning of small towns amidst the urban and suburban growth of contemporary America.

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The Motel in America. By John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle, and Jefferson S. Rogers. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, 387. Illustrations, tables, figures, maps, notes, select bibliography, index. \$32.95.)

The motel is a quintessentially American institution and one that is central to the American cultural experience. Yet its history, like the history of roads and of motor transport, has been slighted. This neglect stems in part from problems in locating sources about a mode of mobility that is primarily individualistic and a service infrastructure that has not retained a coherent body of archival records. It also results from the magnitude and diversity of the subject of land transportation. Where do academics begin when assessing motor mobility generally and roadside lodgings in particular? A study of motels, defined as roadside accommodations, involves not only the sweep of twentieth-century history but also landscape geography, architecture, planning, business management, changing patterns of consumerism, and cultural interactions. It is thus fitting that this interdisciplinary topic should be discussed by two geographers and a historian. Readers may have to use the index to gain the specific information that they require, but they will be effectively informed and greatly entertained.

The authors explore the place of the motel in American society, examining its origins, evolution, and geographical distribution and its changing social and cultural contexts. The book proceeds chronologically, although this chronology is interspersed with thematic chapters examining motel architecture, motels in Albuquerque, and two chains, the early Alamo Plaza Hotel Courts and Holiday Inns. Motels began with rental cabins and cabin courts in the first three decades of the century. By the 1930s they had become easier to recognize and document. Roadside accommodations increased rapidly in the 1930s and then again in the two decades after World War II. They peaked at 61,000 units in 1961, after which they declined in number but not in rooms available for hire. By 1994 there were 3.1 million rooms available in hotels and motels.

Motels also changed markedly in style. Even in the early 1960s most were independent operations. The individualistic “mom and pop” enterprises were, however, fading in the face of referral chains of cooperating motels, motel trade associations, and ownership chains.

The next quarter century witnessed the growth of branded motel franchising. By 1987 64 percent of the country's units were part of a lodgings network, with the top five chains providing nearly 30 percent of the rooms for hire. To attract investment and to convince the nation's travelers of motel utility and respectability, owners had developed "place-product-packaging." This type of chain was owned by a single person or corporate entity, and all branches had the same name, the same architecture, and the same interior room decor and offered the same range of services. Travelers then knew what to expect. For those customers who wanted a differentiated service, moteliers developed a range of budget-luxury lodging brands. By this time motels had become trend setters for modern living. Introducing many clients to such novel commodities as color television, coffee makers, and residential swimming pools, they molded American culture as well as being shaped by it. Much remains to be ascertained about the motel as an essential part of American society, but the authors have provided both a remarkable start and an agenda for future inquiry.

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