

State Register  
#1811

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(Revised March 1992)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
MULTIPLE PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION FORM**

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

New Submission  Amended Submission

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**  
Neon Signs Along Route 66 in New Mexico

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)  
The Historical Resources of Route 66 through New Mexico; The Rise of Automobile Tourism along Route 66 in New Mexico

**C. Form Prepared by**

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**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*David Kammer*  
Signature and title of certifying official

*12/30/02*  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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### Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

	Page Numbers
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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 120 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Neon Signs along Route 66 in New Mexico, 1931-1965

From the first commercial neon sign that appeared in the United States in 1924, a fascia mounted Packard sign in Los Angeles, neon signage was closely associated with the automobile-oriented American commercial strip. With the designation of the federal highway system in 1926 and the growing popularity of automobile tourism and the roadside businesses it spawned, by the 1930s neon signs began to emerge as an indelible feature along the nation's network of highways. Combining the creativity of the sign maker's art with the delicate craft of bending and shaping glass tubes and then pumping them with inert gases, neon signage became an integral part of a commercial roadside cultural landscape defined during the middle third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowhere was this more apparent in New Mexico than along U.S. 66, the federal road that emerged as the state's major east-west highway. All of the larger communities through which it passed by the late 1930s experienced the development of commercial strips illuminated by neon signs. The vast unlit spaces surrounding these communities rendered their polychromatic flashing strips even more striking for those driving along them at sunset and into the night, seeking the services roadside businesses offered. While the mid-1950s brought the introduction of translucent plastic signs and later decades brought the introduction of illuminated reader boards, greatly reducing neon's role as a roadside advertising medium, the early neon signs that have survived stand as reminders of the earlier travel experience along Route 66. Some continue to function as integral elements of viable roadside businesses while others stand derelict. Regardless of their current condition, both community members and passersby retracing Route 66 now regard many of these signs as local landmarks. Their association with the commercial roadside's early history along Route 66 has made these remaining signs indispensable character-defining objects of that cultural landscape

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The neon sign that Packard dealer Earle C. Anthony purchased from inventor Georges Claude in Paris in 1923 and displayed on the façade of his dealership in Los Angeles a year later, marked the arrival of commercial neon signs in the United States. America's embrace of the new electrical sign technology occurred a decade after Claude had completed his first commercial signs for a barbershop and for the Cinzano liquor company in Paris. Seeking to find an inexpensive means of producing oxygen for hospital use and oxyacetylene welding, he found that rare gases, especially neon, derived from the Greek for "new gas," were by-products and sought to find a use for them. Determining that he could seal neon in glass tubing and then bombard it with electricity to produce an intense red color, he saw the potential for marketing this new product as illuminated signage. As Claude began to manufacture signs for many of the city's public places, enhancing its sobriquet as "the City of Lights," he also patented his invention for long-life electrodes and, during the 1920s, tried to use his monopoly to license franchises throughout the world (Stern 1979: 24-28). Infringements, often occurring as a result of skilled employees changing jobs, however, resulted in the proliferation of neon sign making. By 1927, when Charles Lindbergh used the clearly visible neon lights of Le Bourget Field to complete his trans-Atlantic flight, neon signs were becoming widespread throughout the world's larger cities.

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While striking for its ability to bring brilliancy to the night sky as it illuminated commercial buildings not only with playful designs but with polychromatic lines accenting their architectural details, neon signage by no means represented the first effort by merchants to catch the attention of prospective customers. Building facades and storefront windows had become a "blatant thicket of commercial messages" since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Liebs 1985:41). This competition for customers' eyes had accelerated by the end of the century as electricity not only created the possibility for using incandescent bulbs to illuminate signs but also increased the speed of movement and reaction time to signs with the advent of electric trolleys. In the absence of zoning laws and other legal restrictions, merchants began to compete, seeking a visual predominance as a means to broadcast their products. Soon oversized illuminated billboards, buildings outlined with light bulbs, and animated signs driven by electric timers led to what J.B. Jackson termed a "total and dramatic" transformation of the cultural landscape associated with commercial districts (in Liebs 1985:43).

As the private automobile and motor touring grew in popularity during the late 1920s and 1930s, neon signs also proliferated. This was especially true in 1933, the year following the expiration of Claude's patent for long-life electrodes. That year, the repeal of prohibition encouraged neon signage at bars and nightclubs, and the success of the elaborate neon signs that filled the night sky at the Chicago Century of Progress Exhibition of 1933-34 introduced the broader public to the visual delights of neon. At first restricted to the larger cities, in part because of the difficulty in shipping the fragile gas-filled tubes, neon signs became more widespread as more sign makers mastered the skill of bending and pumping glass tubing.

Even as Hollywood producer Busby Berkeley closed his musical extravaganza, "The Gold Diggers of 1933," with a revue in which the dancers played neon-outlined violins, the Last Ever Neon Sign Co. had begun manufacturing signs in Albuquerque. The early 1930s also marked the installation of one the earliest of the historic neon signs remaining along Route 66 in New Mexico, the roof-mounted sign of the Lexington Hotel, in Gallup. City directories show that by the 1940s and through the early 1960s at least three, and sometimes as many as six, companies offered neon sign-making services in Albuquerque. Among them was Electrical Products Consolidated QRS, which began in 1939 and became Electrical Products Company of New Mexico by 1949, the name it retains today. Although its original owners came from Denver, where they had worked for the Denver branch of Electrical Products Company, a neon sign company based in Los Angeles, the company became prominent in New Mexico. Much of its success derived from its use of the Zeon manufacturing process, which set industry high standards for creating the necessary vacuum in glass tubes and then pumping them with inert gases. Periodically inspected by the Chicago company that licensed the use of the term Zeon, signs fabricated using this method were regarded as "the highest quality sign you can buy" (Buell). During the late 1940s, neon sign makers appeared in other communities along Route 66 with General Sign and Sheet Metal Service, later the Ace Sign Company in Tukumcari, creating many of the commercial signs along Route 66 not only in Tukumcari but in San Jon and Santa Rosa, as well.

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While a half-century has elapsed since neon signage enjoyed its greatest popularity along Route 66, a veteran New Mexican sign maker recalls its heyday. Rudy Gonzalez, who began his career in Tucumcari in 1954, recalls that fellow sign maker Jim Hill arrived there in the early 1950s and soon thereafter purchased the Ace Sign Company. During the next several years, Hill designed and manufactured many of the motel and café signs, including the Blue Swallow Motel, La Cita Café, and Ranch House Café signs that continue to line the former highway (Gonzalez). Describing Hill as an "all around good sign painter, designer and artist," he recalls that Hill employed both a neon bender and a sheet metal man to create the signs. Gonzalez also notes that neon signs are readily identifiable as to their maker by the design layout, and points to Hill's characteristic practice of incorporating lines of light bulbs controlled by time switches to animate directional arrows on many of his signs. Subscribing to the sign making trade journal, *Signs of the Times*, Hill stayed abreast of changing styles in signage, including the acquisition in 1954 of a Pittsburgh seaming machine capable of bending sheet metal more easily. Simplifying and strengthening the construction of the corners of metal sign boxes also permitted the introduction of translucent plastic panels. First appearing in Tucumcari in the large box portion of the Palomino Motel sign, the Pittsburgh seam at once made sign making easier but also signaled the industry's widespread shift from neon to plastic.

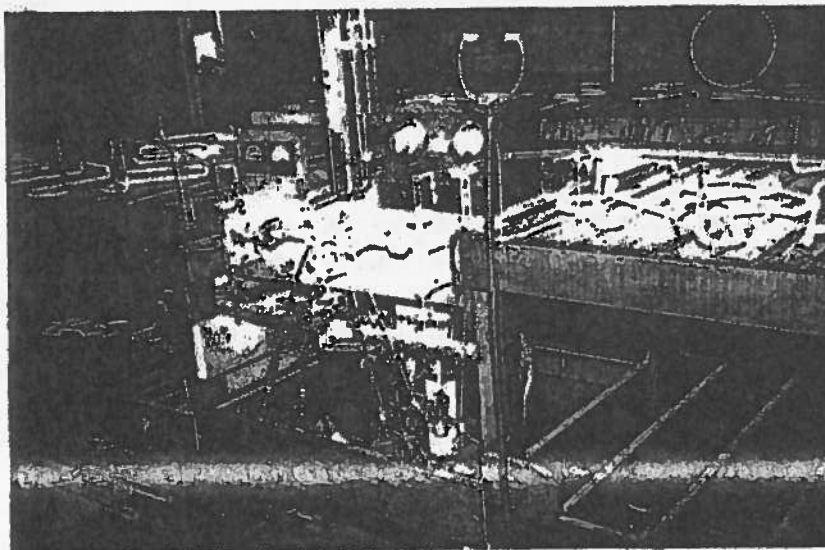
Having been introduced to glass bending in Lincoln, Nebraska, as a teenager in 1936, Harold Buell realized that his digital dexterity enabled him to master the craft quickly. Using his skill as a glass blower, Buell then worked on the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos where he blew scientific glassware. Like many other G.I.s who had served in New Mexico, when he was discharged Buell settled in Albuquerque where he began a 42-year relationship with Electrical Products of New Mexico. During his career he served as a tube bender, shop superintendent, salesman and part owner of the company, attending many of the annual national sign conventions that enabled him to keep abreast with changes in the signmaking trade. Soon after he began working with Electrical Products, Buell devised a vacuum system that enabled the company to expand its output, creating work for as many as three benders who worked solely on fabricating neon tubing (Figure 1). Later, as tax codes changed, encouraging many business owners along Route 66 to lease signs rather than own them, Buell became a successful salesman, covering Route 66 westward to Arizona. Frequently Buell made these sales trips accompanied by Keith Kent, a skilled sign artist who also worked for Electrical Products. Describing Kent as "good and fast," Buell recalls that the designer often discussed signing concepts with prospective customers and then retired to Buell's automobile where he sketched a design within 30 minutes that then became the basis for the sign (Buell). Both Gonzalez and Buell agree that by the mid-1960s the competition to outdo one's neighbors along Route 66 led to raising the height of signs along the highway. This phenomenon is helpful in dating some signs and remains in evidence where two sets of pole-mounted signs with varying heights appear such as at the former Club Café (ca. 1950, 1960) in Santa Rosa or the Premier Motel (1941, ca. 1960) in Albuquerque.

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**Figure 1: Neon Sign System Developed by Harold Buell for Electrical Products Co. of New Mexico, 1947. Neon and Argon Flasks at Lower Center.**

Old photographs and postcards depicting commercial strips along Route 66 in New Mexico indicate how pervasive neon signage was during the 1940s and 1950s. Early images of the El Rancho Hotel in Gallup reveal that the neon sign lining the building's fascia as well as the rooftop mounted sign appeared shortly after the hotel's completion in 1937. Photographs in *Albuquerque Progress* in 1949 indicate that the La Puerta Lodge sign accompanied the completion of the motel building. Similarly, linen type postcards published shortly after the Blue Spruce Motel (ca. 1950) in Gallup and the Westward Ho Motel (1946) in Albuquerque opened depict the signs that continue to serve these businesses today. In some instances, bird's eye photos inserted as part of the postcard's visual composition specifically emphasize the motel sign. Implicit in this technique is a recognition that a readily identifiable sign played an essential role in drawing customers, offering a readily identifiable symbol signaling to the motorist that he had arrived at his destination.

As such, many of the businesses used regional names, employing neon-illuminated imagery to evoke the Southwest. Thus, a Spanish cowboy, or *vaquero*, at the El Don Motel (1955) and a polychromatic headdress at the El Vado Motel (1937)(Figure 2) in Albuquerque, a sombrero at La Cita Café (1959) (Figure 3) in Tucumcari, or even the geographically inaccurate saguaro cactus at the Ranch House Café (ca. 1954) in Tucumcari and the Westward Ho Motel served to place the businesses they symbolized in the Southwest. In doing so, they conveyed a popularized sense of place, albeit inaccurate in the case of saguaros in New Mexico, as part of the effort to attract motorists.

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This evocation of the Southwest also appeared in many of the businesses' names outlined in neon block letters or and names and depicting them through a neon medium, these signs became an essential component of a mid-century roadside cultural landscape comprised of small businesses vying for motorists' patronage. Relying to a great degree on eye-catching signage, each tried to establish a unique identity that would enable it to flourish along Route 66 prior to the widespread development of franchises and chains. In contrast, the mass-produced neon signs used to identify the service stations of the large oil companies were less distinctive, and most have disappeared as the norms for signage changed.



Figure 2: El Vado Motel, Albuquerque. Southwest Imagery.

With the introduction of plastic into sign manufacturing in the mid-1950s, neon signage fell into disfavor. The less expensive, easier to maintain, readily malleable plastic signs and the reader boards that followed gradually eclipsed neon. In some instances, the change in materials resulted in a compromise as plastic sign boxes were welded to the metal poles that still held neon elements. In other instances where businesses sought to emulate, as what Liebs termed the "Great Sign"<sup>1</sup> approach to signage inspired by the success of the Holiday Inn chain as well as the Las Vegas strip, the neon signage was completely removed. So, too, were some signs in Albuquerque and Gallup that fell victim to those communities' signage ordinances during the 1970s when neon was perceived as

<sup>1</sup> Large, iconic highway signs, such as "the famous pulsating, multicolored neon Holiday Inn masterpiece..." Liebs 1985:86.

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visual blight along the commercial strip. Few of those signs survived even in storage yards until renewed interest in neon in recent decades resulted in some individuals' effort to save, if not refurbish, those that remain. Today, as a renewed interest in neon signage and its historic role along the commercial roadside has resulted in the creation of new neon signs, there is also a growing effort to recognize and preserve those neon signs associated with automobile tourism along Route 66 a half century ago.

As New Mexican communities seek to identify their historic role along Route 66, they recognize that these objects contribute to the historic cultural landscape of their earlier commercial strip and that preserving them contributes to preserving that historic identity. Many community members also recognize that even in the instances where a sign has ceased to function as a marker for a viable business, it retains a value for its familiarity, humor, or the former business that it recalls. In the process, many of these historic signs have accumulated layers of meaning so that rather than merely signaling a business, they function as icons, easily identifiable images representative of an historic commercial strip.



**Figure 3: La Cita Restaurant, Tucumcari. Architectural Signage with Neon.**



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In support of this interest in preserving historic neon, in the spring of 2002 the New Mexico Cultural Properties Review Committee voted to list a thematic nomination, "Neon Signs along Route 66 in New Mexico" in the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties. This listing includes 27 neon signs fabricated between 1931 and 1965. Subsequently, the Route 66 Preservation Program of the National Park Service granted \$50,000 to the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division (NMHPD), which then contracted with the New Mexico Route 66 Association to refurbish at least seven historic signs located along the former Route 66 alignment. As this project has moved forward, it has received substantial publicity and resulted in growing public support for recognizing and preserving historic resources associated with Route 66.

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**F. Associated Property Types**

Property Type Description

Appurtenant to tourist-oriented properties situated along alignments of the former U.S. 66 in New Mexico, neon signs are character-defining objects associated with many of the highway's motels, as well as some restaurants and curio shops dating from the 1930s through the early 1960s. All of the signs within the property type encompass common physical attributes as to setting, various types of mounting and various styles of lettering. Generally setback five to 40 feet from the roadway, the majority of these signs are attached to freestanding poles, while a minority are mounted on rooftops, attached to building elevations or fascia mounted. The visual effect of some of these signs is sometimes further enhanced through the use of ancillary neon tubing outlining the associated building's architectural details such as parapets or portals. Signs surveyed pertinent to the preparation of this historic context range in height from eight feet to approximately 60 feet and in width from six feet to 35 feet. The majority of these signs represent the flat letter style of neon signage in which letters and, sometimes, artwork are painted on a metal box, while a minority represent the channel letter style in which letters are in relief with the neon tubing placed within the recessed channel. In both cases the letters and images are fronted with a vacuum glass tubing filled with neon or another inert gas and with metal terminals, or electrodes, at each end providing high voltage electrical power. Many of these signs also contain massed light bulbs often used in concert with neon and controlled by time switches to create animated lighting sequences. A few also contain translucent plastic panels, introduced in the early 1950s as the manufacture of sheet metal boxes was improved and plastic emerged as a durable, inexpensive mass-produced sign material. Some of the signs also reveal metal-framed plastic-faced reader boards that were attached to the original signs' posts at a later date but are clearly reversible. All of the signs share an associative attribute as well. While some now front vacant buildings and have ceased to function as commercial markers, all of them are landmarks closely associated with an era in which neon signage proliferated along the commercial strips of the highway. As such, they have assumed an iconic role, familiar both to community residents and those retracing Route 66.

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Despite their differences as to size, artistic composition and message, all of the contributing signs share common characteristics as to their components and their technology of construction and installation. Best described as luminous tube lighting, neon signs consist of vacuum glass tubes fitted at each end with a metal terminal, or electrode, and then filled with a small amount of rare gas, most often neon but occasionally argon. When charged with a high voltage electrical power introduced from electrodes, neon produces a clear intense red and argon a grayish blue that can be made a more intense blue with the additional use of mercury. Additional colors are achieved through the coloring of the luminous glass tube. The tubing itself represented the craft of bending glass into whatever forms the signage required, pumping it with the necessary rare gas, and then sealing it

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by melting one tip of the tube. Properly done, periodically maintained exterior neon signs along the highway could last as long as 30 years barring hailstorms, vandalism, or vehicular accidents that sometimes marked their history along Route 66. Many of the still functioning signs included in this nomination reflect the efforts of their owners to maintain them and refurbish them as necessary.

Common also to all of these historic signs was the technology of construction and installation. Neon tubes were generally affixed to metal. Most often they were attached to a sheet metal box on which illuminated details such as letters or figures were painted onto the metal with the box providing a housing for the wiring and electrodes as well as the two sides necessary for a double-faced sign. The glass tubing was then attached to the electrodes at holes punched through the sheet metal. Less frequently, a silicate glass was fired onto the metal, creating a porcelain, or vitreous, enamel coating over which the tubing was placed. In many instances the image painted on the sign was elaborate and richly polychromatic so that the sign was highly visible even without neon during the day. The El Vado Motel sign with its rainbow-like halo surrounding a warrior's head, and the Blue Spruce Lodge sign with dark shadowing adding depth to the tree-shaped sign's boughs both command attention during daylight as well as at night.

In many instances the letters and figures painted on the sheet metal were flat; in other instances the edges of the letters or figures were raised, creating channels in which the neon tubing was placed. While the latter channel letter style offered the advantage of concentrating the tube's light, thus producing greater visibility, its flat horizontal surfaces tended to retain moisture (Figure 4). Even in the arid Southwest moisture has taken its toll with examples of rusting evident on the horizontal planes of the few remaining channel letter signs (Hinckley).

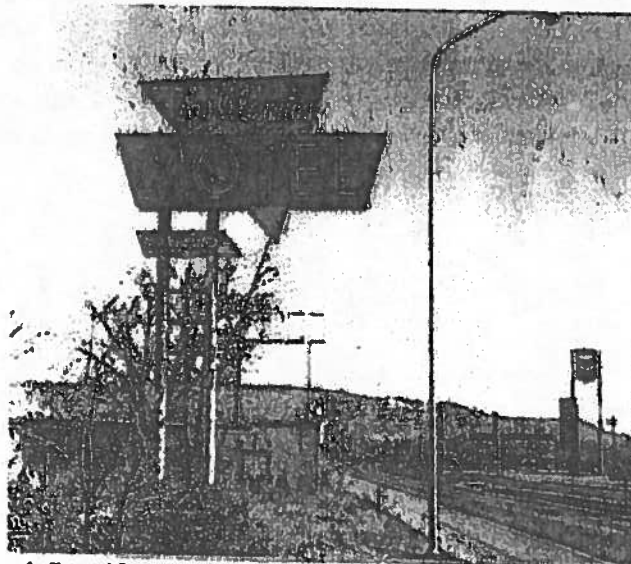


Figure 4: Los Alamitos Motel, Grants. Sign with Channel Letters.

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Mounting techniques also vary with regard to exterior neon signs. Along Route 66, historic signs include examples of the pole, vertical, rooftop and fascia techniques of mounting signs. The vast majority of these signs are pole signs with bracket mounts attached to steel, or occasionally, creosote-treated wood posts. They predominate along the automobile-oriented sections of the highway's commercial strips, while signs projecting vertically and attached to building walls or affixed to fascias generally appear along downtown business district sections such as along Central Avenue in downtown Albuquerque and Railroad Avenue (now Route 66 Boulevard) in downtown Gallup. Only a small number of rooftop signs appear along the highway.

Typically, pole signs are mounted to one or more steel poles with welded metal brackets holding the sheet metal sign boxes. Smaller signs are sometimes cantilevered from a single pole while larger signs are generally placed between two or more widely spaced supports. The six-foot wide Sands Motel sign in Moriarty (ca. 1955) illustrates the former technique, while the 33-foot wide Rio Pecos Truck Terminal sign in Santa Rosa (1948)(Figure 5) illustrates the latter. The height of the signs also varies, ranging from the 10-foot high Western Motel sign (ca. 1954) in San Jon to the tower-like sign of the Premier Motel in Albuquerque, rising more than 60 feet. Historic photographs and postcards of pre-World War II commercial strips along Route 66 indicate a relative uniformity to the height of signs, especially in the smaller towns where the highway remained a two-lane road until the widened in the early 1950s.

With more traffic moving at higher speeds many business owners sought to enhance their signage, either replacing them or raising their height. In the late 1950s, for example, the Blue Swallow Motel in Tucumcari installed a larger sign (Figure 6). Using both a steel pole and the rooftop of the motel office as the two supports framing the sign, the new sign created a slight canopy under which prospective lodgers might park while registering. In contrast, the Premier Motel more than doubled the height of its sign by adding another unit to its already installed steel support pole around 1960. Drawing from precedents appearing along the commercial strip in Las Vegas, these raised signs, sometimes employing plastic elements as well, reflected what one veteran sign maker describes as a "constant struggle to outdo your neighbor" (Gonzalez).

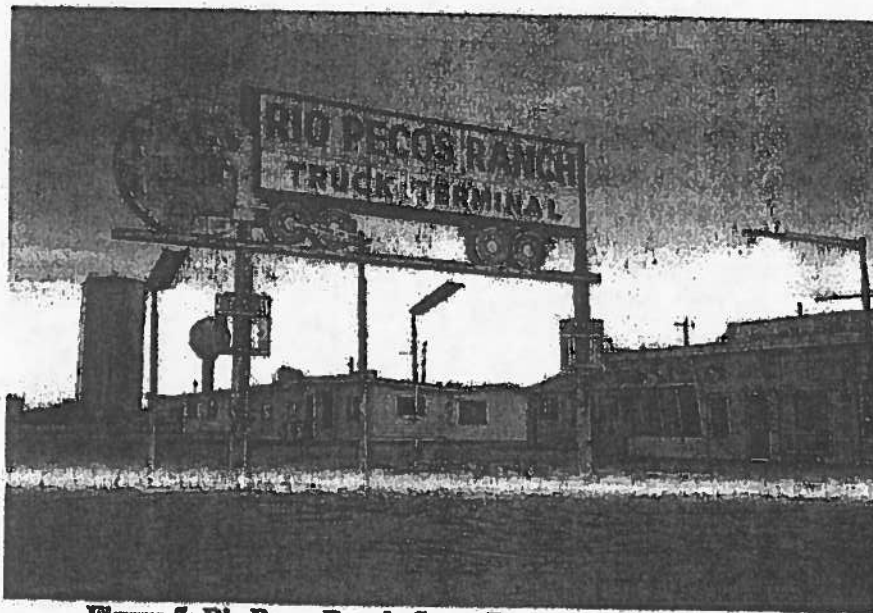
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**Figure 5: Rio Pecos Ranch, Santa Rosa. Pole-Mounted Sign.**

The pole-mounted signs also reflect common siting practices. Given their automobile oriented function, most are located within 20 feet of the roadway yet sufficiently removed from the pathway of vehicles entering and exiting the property. Thus in the case of signs marking restaurants, where parking lots were likely to become congested, the sign was often at the front corner of the lot as in the case of the sign for the former Club Café in Santa Rosa. While the majority of signs are attached to steel support poles that simply rise out of the ground or asphalt pavement, in some cases, particularly in instances where the sign is located near the front center of the property, the base of the sign's poles receives additional protection. This protection often assumes the form of a concrete block or railroad tie footing, sometimes serving as a planter. The sign fronting the former Ranch House Café, for instance, emanates from a three foot high concrete block planter while scored stucco-coated buttressed support piers serve as brackets framing the scripted neon lettering of the La Puerta Lodge sign (Figure 7)

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Figure 6: Blue Swallow Motel, Tucumcari. Signage Updating.

In general, the siting of motel signs reflects an effort to include the sign as an integral part of the composition of the buildings on the property. Signs are often located near the office. Thus, a motel with a U-plan or an L-plan and an office located in a freestanding building at the front of the courtyard, such as the Westward Ho Motel in Albuquerque, generally has its sign near the office building, often in the center of the property. In contrast, motels in which the office is an integral part of the motel building may have their signs fronting either side of the property or serving as a centerpiece of the courtyard. The El Coronado Motel sign (ca. 1949) in Gallup, for instance, is located at the sidewalk at the southeast corner of the property (with the office at the rear center) while El Vado Motel sign in Albuquerque stands alone at the front of the courtyard formed by the U-plan of the motel complex.

Less common among the historic neon signs associated with automobile tourism along Route 66 are vertical signs mounted to buildings, fascia, and rooftop mounted signs. Generally characteristic of building signage in commercial business districts, where fewer businesses catered specifically to motorists, building mounted and fascia signs appear on the facades of older buildings that served automobile tourists along the downtown

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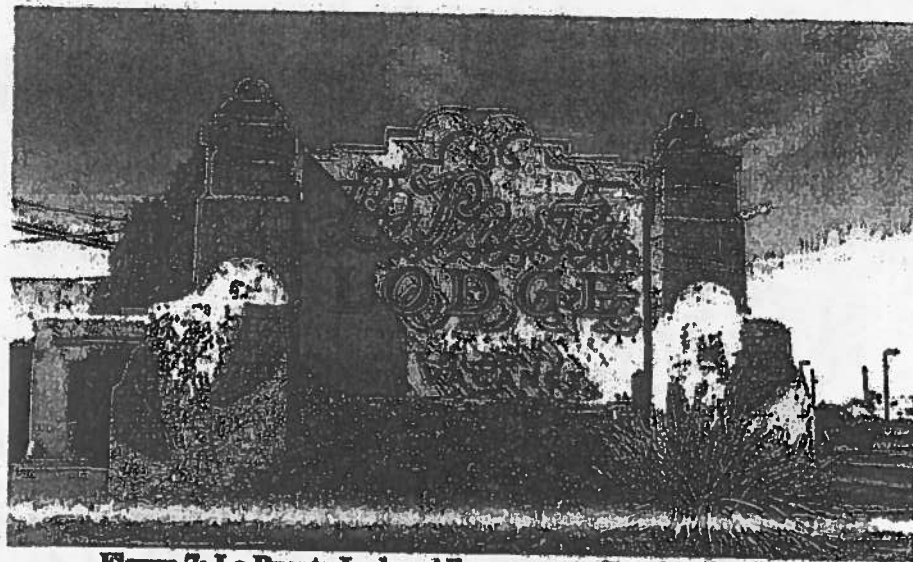


Figure 7: La Puerta Lodge, Albuquerque. Bracket Mounting.

commercial trips in Albuquerque and Gallup. In Gallup, the Lexington Hotel's vertically mounted sign dating to the early 1970s, represents an effort to attract both motorists and pedestrians while its rooftop sign, the earliest remaining sign along Route 66, recalls the late 19<sup>th</sup> century practice of using rooftops to optimize visibility in urban settings. In the case of the hotel, its sight line extends four blocks to the railroad depot. In contrast, the neon sign extending along the fascia above the entry of the El Rancho Hotel (1937), also in Gallup, represents a motif more commonly associated with commercial building facades transferred to a hotel catering primarily to motorists (Figure 8). Appearing infrequently along automobile-oriented sections of Route 66 were rooftop signs, few of which remain today. Some rooftop signs with their vertical mounted sheet metal boxes, such as the Franciscan Motel sign (ca. 1955) in Grants, resemble small billboards mounted with guy wires. Others, such as the Paradise Motel sign (ca. 1955) in Tucumcari, employ channel letters individually mounted on a metal scaffolding atop a two-story hipped roof. This technique of freestanding letters is also evident in the freestanding neon script of the roof-mounted sign at the Premier Motel in Albuquerque. It permitted sign makers to employ larger letters visible at a greater distance while diminishing the threat of wind damage often caused by the wind's sail effect normally exerted on large metal boxes.

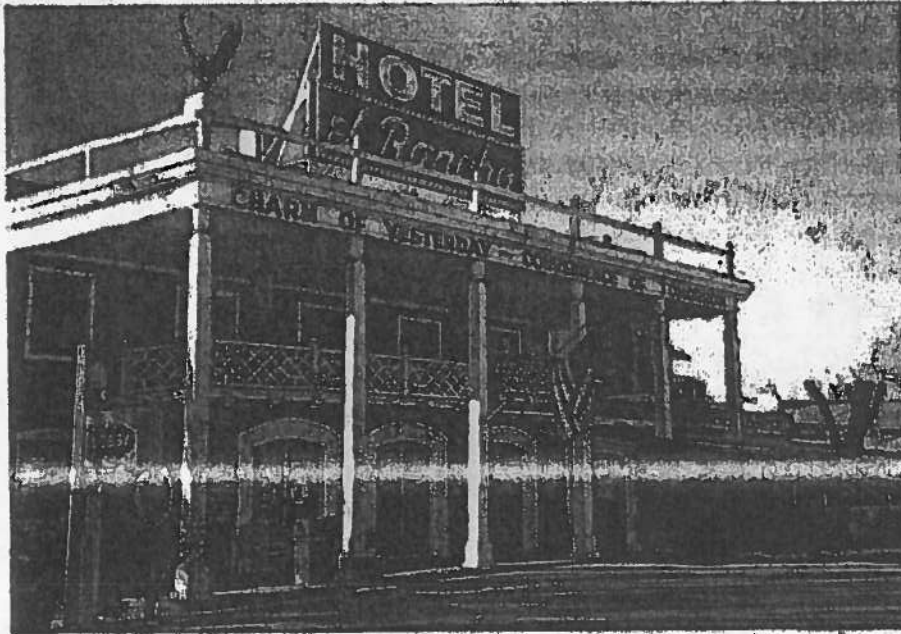
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**Figure 8: El Rancho Hotel, Gallup. Roof-Mounted Sign.**



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Property Type Significance

The majority of the neon signs that lined Route 66 during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century no longer remain. Many have been demolished along with the commercial properties to which they advertised. Some stand derelict much like the buildings in back of them while others have been incorporated into newer plastic signs, their earlier neon elements only discernable amidst translucent plastic reader boxes by the punched electrical holes that remain in the earlier sheet metal portions of the overall sign. In other instances, old signs have been removed and replaced by new plastic-faced or reader board signs indicating the new business housed in the older building. Still others in Albuquerque and Gallup have been removed as part of those cities' earlier efforts to regulate the commercial strip through sign ordinances.

Those remaining signs are readily discernable to both local residents and the increasing numbers of tourists seeking remaining evidence of the single highway most represented in the American popular culture. As discussed in the historic context, signs included in this multiple property submission are significant under Criterion C because their physical attributes of location, setting, workmanship, design and materials reflect the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century art of neon sign fabrication along Route 66 in New Mexico. They are also significant under Criterion A because of their associative attributes as character-defining elements of a roadside commercial strip that have evolved to become icons symbolizing the earlier era of automobile tourism along Route 66.

Property Type Registration Requirements

To be eligible for National Register listing a sign must retain a high degree of integrity as to its physical and associative attributes as discussed in the Property Type section. A sign must also be associated with the historic theme of automobile tourism treated in the Multiple Property listing to the National Register of Historic Places, "The Rise of Automobile Tourism along Route 66 in New Mexico." It must also retain sufficient character-defining elements associated with neon sign production during the period of significance 1931-1965 as to setting, location, workmanship, design and materials. In those instances in which alterations to the original signs have occurred, such as the addition of reader boxes to the signs' support poles, those additions must generally be reversible. Only in those exceptional instances in which the neon elements of the sign illustrate an outstanding example of the neon signmaker's art or the signs are recognized as a local landmark, are neon signs with the plastic surface of the sign greater than 50% considered eligible.

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**G. Geographical Data**

Neon signs associated with Route 66 in New Mexico during the period of significance are located in Quay, Guadalupe, Torrance, Bernalillo, Cibola and McKinley counties.

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**H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

The multiple property listing for neon signage along Route 66 in New Mexico grew out of an ongoing and broadening interest in preserving the architectural and historic resources associated with Route 66 and the rise of automobile tourism in New Mexico. Dating to the completion of the multiple property submission, "The Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 in New Mexico," listed in the National Register in 1992, the role and location of historic neon signage was recognized in the property type discussion. The location of historic signage was also noted on Historic Building Inventory forms prepared during the original resources survey completed during 1991-92. As interest in Route 66 grew, culminating with congressional passage of the Route 66 Preservation Act in 1999, further efforts to recognize and preserve highway-related resources have occurred. During 2001, historian David Kammer completed a re-survey of the highway and its resources in New Mexico, adding more than 40 properties dating to the late 1950s and 1960s to the original inventory of over 550 properties.

As he conducted this survey, Kammer paid particular attention to historic signage, noting it on survey forms and developing a methodology as to measuring, describing, and analyzing historic signage as to its mounting, letter type, location, condition and alterations. Kammer also conducted three interviews with veteran signmakers, which, in part, permitted him to date signs despite the fact that the records of the two major sign companies fabricating signs along Route 66 during the period of significance had been destroyed. The result was a reasonably accurate dating of over three dozen signs dating to before 1970. The dates on these signs were then corroborated in Tucumcari, Albuquerque, and Gallup with city directories listing the dates of businesses at each site. In addition, numerous postcards dating from the late 1930s through the 1950s were examined as to the specific appearance of signs dating to the period of the card. This comparative approach permitted a determination of the property type based upon the signs' function and historical period.

Between January and March 2002, Kammer conducted further research, resulting in the preparation and listing in April 2002 in the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties of a multiple property nomination pertaining to neon signage (HPD# 1811). The context of this nomination also provided the basis for a neon sign restoration project funded by the National Park Service's Route 66 Preservation Program. Administered through the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division and carried out by the New Mexico Route 66 Association, the project has resulted in the restoration of 11 historic neon signs associated with the highway and its cultural landscape. In preparing the nomination, Kammer established requirements for integrity based upon evaluating each sign as to its original appearance and changes, generally the addition of plastic elements and reader boards, that have occurred. While economic viability of a business associated with a sign was a consideration in determining the recipients of restoration grants, it was not in considering the historic integrity of signs for register listing. As a result, determinations of integrity were based on a comparative evaluation of all signs dating to the period of significance with the approximately two dozen signs that were listed

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representing the best examples of the remaining signs. Those individual signs selected to complete this multiple property submission will be representative of those listed in the State Register of Cultural Properties

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