



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Folklore in Motion

Untiedt, Kenneth L.

Published by University of North Texas Press

Untiedt, Kenneth L.

Folklore in Motion: Texas Travel Lore.

University of North Texas Press, 2007.

Project MUSE.[muse.jhu.edu/book/5473](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/5473).



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/5473>

## EATING UP ROUTE 66: FOODWAYS OF MOTORISTS CROSSING THE TEXAS PANHANDLE

by T. Lindsay Baker



From the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s, U.S. Highway 66 served as a major thoroughfare for motorists traveling between the Midwest and the Pacific coast. In the mid-1920s, the U.S. Bureau of Roads began designating highways in the forty-eight states with identifying numbers. In 1926, the agency gave number 66 to a combination of roads that started at Chicago and passed through St. Louis, Oklahoma City, Amarillo, and Albuquerque to reach Los Angeles, over 2,400 miles away. In Texas the roads that became Route 66 were dirt tracks parallel to the Rock Island Railroad across the Panhandle.

Few highways in America gave travelers such geographical and cultural diversity as Route 66. From the cornfields of Illinois, drivers went through the Ozarks in Missouri before entering the oil fields and red hills of Oklahoma. They then crossed the treeless plains in the Texas Panhandle before driving through the deserts and Indian country of New Mexico and Arizona. In their un-airconditioned cars they proceeded through the Mojave Desert, passed by orange groves in southern California, and reached the Pacific shore at Santa Monica. By the hundreds of thousands, drivers made this trip on mostly two-lane highways that were not even fully paved until the 1940s.<sup>1</sup>

The collection of roads comprising Route 66 brought together travelers with specific needs and local people eager to satisfy those needs for the right price. Gasoline stations, auto garages, vulcanizing shops, hotels, tourist courts, and cafes sprang up where they had never operated before. Spending by motorists created entire commercial strips of businesses that catered to the needs of travelers. Many of these places offered food.<sup>2</sup>

Not all motorists could afford to buy prepared meals. Instead, they either carried food from home or stopped during travel to buy groceries. In the days before refrigeration they had fewer options in carrying fresh foods than we have today. In 1939, Linda Anderson traveled Route 66 with her family from the Midwest to California across the Panhandle, and she later recalled, "We would stop at the small independent grocery stores and pick up bread, lunch meat, and soft drinks for our lunches. . . . We . . . pulled off to the side of the road to eat our sandwiches. . . . It was cooler if we could find a place to picnic under the trees. . . ." <sup>3</sup> Not all travelers could afford the luxury of pleasant roadside picnics. During the Dust Bowl years thousands of dispossessed farmers and others from Oklahoma, Arkansas, and other states used Route 66 as their avenue of hoped-for escape from poverty through migration to California. In 1933, the City of Amarillo opened free soup kitchens for the indigent, while the Federal Emergency Relief Administration operated a Transient Bureau in the city twenty-four hours a day for two years to assist impoverished migrants on their way westward. <sup>4</sup>

Home-style eating-places sprang up the length of Route 66, with hundreds operating at one time or another across the Texas

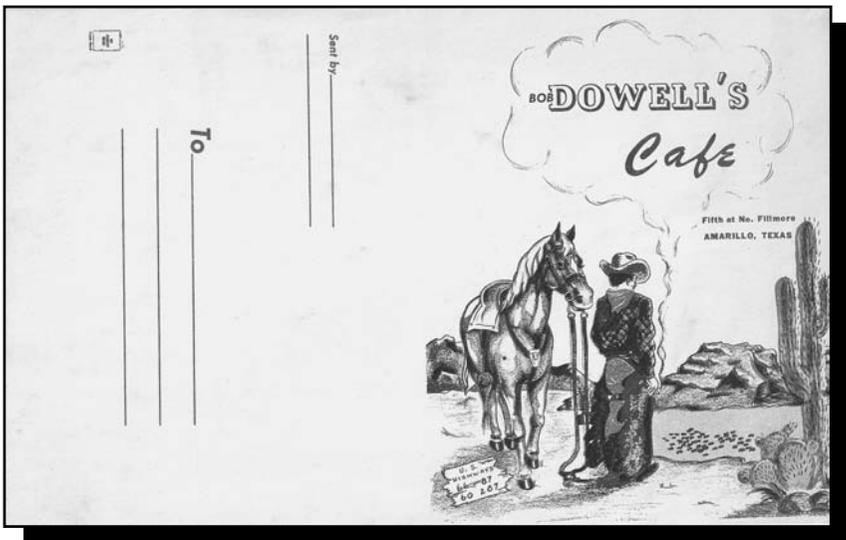


Postcard for the Aristocrat Restaurant, Amarillo, Texas

Panhandle. Many of these establishments, usually called cafés, functioned as free-standing businesses, but some of them fed travelers in conjunction with fuel and repair services at places that came to be known as truck stops. Others served meals to travelers near or alongside tourist courts, later known as motels. What sorts of meals did they serve?

Surviving historic menus give us windows through which to view typical Route 66 fare in the Panhandle. The Truck Stop Restaurant in Amarillo, actually more a café than a restaurant, about the time that old Route 66 was being bypassed by Interstate 40 in 1968, offered its customers breakfasts of eggs cooked any way, hash browned potatoes, and ham, bacon, or sausage with biscuits or toast for \$1.25. Other breakfast options included steak and eggs, plain or cheese omelets, pancakes, and such sides as sweet rolls, cereal, cinnamon toast, and French toast. The cook could prepare every item on the menu except biscuits, just using a grill.<sup>5</sup>

Bob Dowell's Café, directly on Route 66 at Fifth and North Fillmore in Amarillo, offered its customers representative noonday and evening café fare during the 1950s. Its menu featured steaks and chops, deep-fried chicken, seafood, a limited range of what it



Postcard for Bob Dowell's Café, Amarillo, Texas

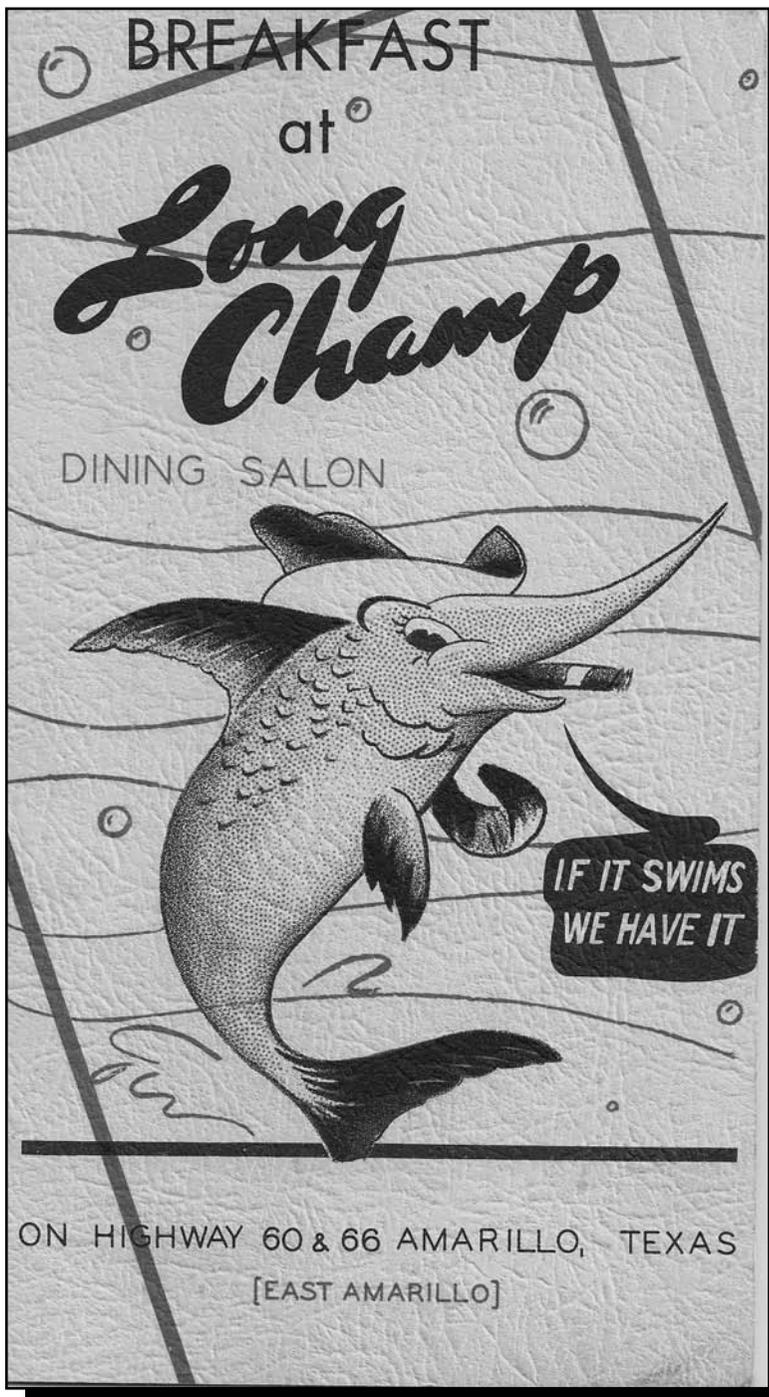


January 1928, just a year-and-a-half after Route 66 received its numerical designation.<sup>7</sup>

A handful of restaurants on Route 66 in the Panhandle specialized in particular fare. This was the case of the Long Champ Dining Salon at 705 Northeast 8th in Amarillo, which starting in the 1940s and for two decades featured seafood flown in for freshness. With a neon sign that beckoned, "Tourists Welcome," the Long Champ offered its diners such meals as broiled Florida pompano, broiled Texas flounder, fried individual catfish, and whole Maine lobsters. Acknowledging its location in the Panhandle, in the heart of cattle country, the menu also offered a full range of steaks, allowing customers to select their own piece of meat before it was cooked. Vegetable options at the Long Champ included candied yams, sautéed green peppers, buttered beets, and green peas, with soups ranging from French onion to New Orleans gumbo. Dining for travelers at the Long Champ clearly was a treat.<sup>8</sup>

Some restaurants on Route 66 became visual as well as culinary landmarks for travelers. This clearly was the distinction of the U-Drop-Inn of Shamrock in the eastern Panhandle. It came into existence as a consequence of an early-1930s change in the alignment of U.S. Highway 66 from downtown streets to a new location several blocks north. L. R. Randall discovered that he owned all four corners of the prime real estate that would become the intersection of U.S. 66 east and west with U.S. 83 north and south.

After Randall's death, Amarillo businessman James M. Tindall approached his widow with an offer in 1934. He agreed to build for her daughter and son-in-law, Bebe and John Nunn, a new building on one of the corners if she would sell him some of the valuable land. John Nunn then described the combined service station and restaurant that he wanted. Architect Joseph Champ Berry then created a fanciful concrete and glazed tile masterpiece of Art Deco design. Bebe Nunn remembered, "Back in the '30s, neon was all the go. Our sign and tower was all bordered in green and red neon. . . . It shined so bright that you could see it from way back past McLean." Soon, the new eating-place became known as



The menu for the Long Champ Dining Salon, Amarillo, Texas

“the swankiest of the swank” restaurants. All up and down Route 66 motorists came to know its reputation.

The sophisticated kitchen included walk-in coolers where John Nunn kept sides of aged beef from which he personally cut meat. “We had a great number of steak eaters,” Bebe Nunn explained, “so they knew they could ask for a certain thickness and get it.” Years later Lou Kofton stopped in Shamrock in 1952 on a cross-country drive from California. “I remember this gas station because it had a tower and was elegant. . . . I also had something to eat at Nunn’s Café, at the other end of the same building. . . .”

About 1960, the bus company serving Shamrock shifted its station to the restaurant. Grace Brunner, who had become the owner, recalled, “Back then . . . We had about ten [bus] schedules a day. We kept sandwiches made up and put them on the counter before a bus was due, as there wasn’t time to order from the kitchen. . . . We had to have several waitresses. We also kept plenty of pies and apples. Of course, candy, cookies, chips and gum.”

The venerable station and café operated commercially until 1995. It then stood vacant for several years, before being restored in 2001 to serve as a visitors’ information center for Shamrock.<sup>9</sup>

Travelers today find that many if not most of the places where they choose to dine are “chain restaurants” or franchises of national firms. One of the earliest such eating-places on Route 66 in Texas was the Jones Brothers Drive-In that sold franchised “Chicken in the Rough” in two Amarillo locations. The specialty had its origin in Oklahoma City. There Beverly and Rubye Osborne had opened a six-stool diner in 1921, serving hamburgers, fried chicken, and other grilled and fried fare; in time their business prospered and grew. In 1936, the couple took a trip to California when a bump in the road sent their lunch, a meal of fried chicken, spilling onto the seat. Rubye joked to Beverly, “This is really chicken in the rough.” The incident led them to an innovation in American dining.

Once they returned to Oklahoma City, the Osbornes started serving what they called “chicken in the rough”—pieces of cut-up

### CHICKEN IN THE ROUGH

(SERVED WITHOUT SILVERWARE)  
ONE-HALF FRIED CHICKEN  
(UNJOINTED)  
GLOBE OF SHOESTRING POTATOES  
HOT ROLLS

\$ 1<sup>¢</sup>

<p><b>FRIED CHICKEN LIVERS &amp; GIZZARDS (IN THE ROUGH)</b>.....\$1.00</p> <p><b>SHOESTRING POTATOES</b>.....\$1.00</p> <p><b>ALL GIZZARDS</b>.....75¢</p>	<p><b>ALL WHITE MEAT</b>.....11¢</p> <p><b>TWO BREAKS</b>.....TWO WINGS</p> <p><b>"TWO (\$2) BUCKS"</b>.....</p>
---	--

**STEAKS**

<p><b>CHOICE T-BONE STEAK</b>.....\$1.50</p> <p><b>N. C. STRIP SIRLOIN STEAK</b>.....\$1.50</p> <p><b>SPECIAL CLUB STEAK</b>.....\$1.40</p> <p><b>FILET MIGNON STEAK</b>.....\$1.40</p> <p><b>TOP N. C. SIRLOIN STEAK</b>.....\$1.40</p> <p><b>SMALL T-BONE STEAK</b>.....\$1.25</p> <p><b>VIRGINIA HAM STEAK</b>.....\$1.25</p>	<p><b>CHICKEN FRIED STEAK</b>.....75¢</p> <p><b>GRILLED PORK CHOPS, ON TOAST</b>.....90¢</p> <p><b>BREADED VEAL CUTLETS</b>.....75¢</p> <p><b>SALISBURY STEAK, HUNTER STYLE</b>.....75¢</p> <p><b>FRIED CALF LIVER, ONIONS</b>.....75¢</p> <p><b>GRILLED MINUTE STEAK</b>.....75¢</p> <p><b>HAMBURGER STEAK, ONIONS</b>.....75¢</p>
--	---

**AND CHOPS**

SERVED WITH FRENCH FRIED POTATOES AND HOT ROLLS

**FRIED JUMBO SHRIMP**.....\$1.25

**GRILLED HADDOCK STEAK**.....75¢

**FRIED TENDERLOIN OF TROUT**.....75¢

**tartar sauce**.....65¢

**SHRIMP COCKTAIL**.....45¢

**SHRIMP SALAD:**

**SMALL**.....35¢

**LARGE**.....60¢



**SANDWICHES**

<p><b>AMERICAN CHEESE</b>.....25¢</p> <p><b>FRIED HAM</b>.....35¢</p> <p><b>COLD BEEF</b>.....30¢</p> <p><b>COLD PORK</b>.....30¢</p> <p><b>BACON &amp; TOMATO</b>.....35¢</p> <p><b>HAM &amp; EGG</b>.....40¢</p> <p><b>CHEESEBURGER</b>.....25¢</p> <p><b>DENVER</b>.....45¢</p> <p><b>HAMBURGER</b>.....15¢</p> <p><b>GRILLED CHEESE</b>.....30¢</p> <p><b>BARBECUED BEEF</b>.....35¢</p> <p><b>FRIED EGG</b>.....40¢</p> <p><b>BACON &amp; EGG</b>.....40¢</p> <p><b>CLUB HOUSE</b>.....65¢</p>	<p><b>BASKET STEAK</b> SERVED SANDWICH STYLE IN A BASKET WITH SHOESTRING POTATOES 50¢</p> <p><b>CHICKBURGER</b> IN A BASKET WITH SHOESTRING POTATOES 25¢</p> <p><b>RANCHBURGER</b> IN A BASKET WITH SHOESTRING POTATOES 25¢</p>
---	---



**OMELETTES**

WITH TOAST OR ROLLS

<p><b>WITH CHICKEN LIVERS</b>.....60¢</p> <p><b>WITH BACON</b>.....60¢</p> <p><b>AMERICAN CREAM CHEESE</b>.....60¢</p> <p><b>DENVER</b>.....75¢</p> <p><b>PLAIN</b>.....50¢</p> <p><b>MINCED HAM</b>.....60¢</p>	<p><b>DESSERTS</b></p> <p><b>PIE</b>.....15¢</p> <p><b>PIE A LA MODE</b>.....25¢</p> <p><b>ICE CREAM</b>.....15¢</p>
--	--



**SALADS**

<p><b>COLD BAKED HAM</b>.....50¢</p> <p><b>POTATO SALAD</b>.....90¢</p> <p><b>ASSORTED COLD MEAT PLATE</b>.....75¢</p> <p><b>POTATO SALAD</b>.....50¢</p> <p><b>CHICKEN SALAD PLATE</b>.....50¢</p> <p><b>SLICED TOMATOES</b>.....35¢</p>	<p><b>COMBINATION</b>.....50¢</p> <p><b>CHOPPED VEGETABLE</b>.....50¢</p> <p><b>LETTUCE &amp; TOMATO</b>.....45¢</p> <p><b>SLICED TOMATOES</b>.....35¢</p> <p><b>HEAD LETTUCE</b>.....35¢</p>
---	---

**COLD PLATES**

Sent by \_\_\_\_\_

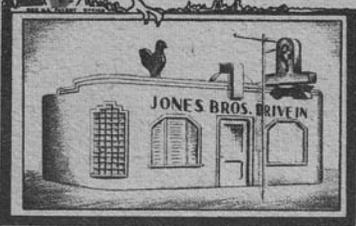
To \_\_\_\_\_

# JONES BROTHERS

## DRIVE - IN

413 N. E. EIGHTH  
AMARILLO, TEXAS





Postcard for the Jones Brothers Drive-In, Amarillo, Texas (with menu on back)

deep-fried chicken on a bed of French fries with a buttered roll and honey—**with no silverware**. They did this at a time when proper etiquette required the use of a knife and fork for eating chicken. With a price of 50¢ for half a chicken and the trimmings, and using a copyrighted cartoon of a rooster holding golf clubs, their idea of casual dining caught on. It *really* caught on. By World War II, the Osbornes were running seven restaurants in Oklahoma City, the largest of which, on Route 66, seated 1,100 diners.

By this time they had begun franchising the “Chicken in the Rough” restaurants, eventually seeing them in 234 locations across most of the country. Claude A. and J. Marvin Jones of Amarillo purchased an Osborne franchise and opened two drive-in restaurants at 413 Northeast 8th and at 208 West 6th, both on Route 66. Later known as the Jones Brothers Village Inn, the eating-place survived into the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

Some restaurants became Route 66 attractions in themselves. The major example in Texas is the Big Texan Steak Ranch, established by Bob Lee in 1960 on Northeast 8th in Amarillo. For hundreds of miles each direction from the city, its billboards today advertise, “Free 72-Oz. Steak Ahead!” The eating-place began as no more than an ordinary barbecue cafeteria with western décor that happened to be on Route 66 near the Amarillo Livestock Auction. One day a horse managed to get out of one of the auction cowboy’s trailers in the parking lot. As the owner struggled to jump onto the horse, passing motorists almost ran into each other as they watched. Bob Lee recognized the sensation that the man on horseback had caused. He approached one of the cowboys and said, “Look, you come back tomorrow. I’ll pay you twenty-five bucks just to sit on your horse and wave to people.” The wrangler thought he was crazy but took the money. The gimmick worked. Route 66 travelers started pouring into the restaurant. Lee dressed his employees like cowboys and had them carry little six-shooters at their sides. Then he put up a huge metal sign in the shape of a cowboy. Still more tourists came.

Working cowboys from the livestock auction intrigued the out-of-state guests, so Bob Lee started cashing their paychecks on Fridays and offering them twenty-five-cent beers just so that they would hang around the restaurant and provide local color. Son Danny Lee remembered, "They were such pigs when they ate." Seeing how much the men could put away at the tables, the elder Lee made the auction cowboys a memorable offer: "I'll tell you what. Next Friday night, when you guys get paid, everybody come up here and put up \$5. I'm going to serve you one-pound steaks for one hour, and whoever eats the most gets all the money in the pot." The cowboys came, and so did the news media. Danny Lee continued the story, "Sure enough, the cowboys showed up and my dad started serving them one-pound steaks for an hour. One guy was ahead of everybody, and he said, 'Well, bring me a salad, too. What else you got there? Bring me a shrimp cocktail and bring me a roll.'" By the time the hour was up, he had consumed four-and-a-half pounds of steak plus the trimmings. Bob Lee, realizing that the cowboys had given him yet another gimmick to attract customers, declared to the media, "From this day forward, anybody that comes in here and eats a seventy-two-ounce steak, complete with side orders, will get it for free." The Big Texan boomed.

The day in 1968 that traffic in Amarillo diverted from historic Route 66 to Interstate 40, Bob Lee and his family saw their business drop an estimated eighty percent. They knew that they had to move or go bust. The family purchased five abandoned barracks from the old Amarillo Air Force Base, relocated them to a new site at the east side of Amarillo on the Interstate, and used them to create a new Big Texan Steak Ranch. With a 450-seat dining room, a full menu, live Western music, a shooting gallery, and waiters still dressed as cowboys, the eating-place remains a major attraction for interstate travelers.<sup>11</sup>

For the most part the traditional eating-places on Route 66 have gone the same way as Bob Lee at the Big Texan. As Interstate 40 bypassed their towns, they either made do with a trickle of trade

from motorists and locals on the old business routes, they went out of business, or they relocated to the side of the new roadway. Motorists pour off the highway in search of sandwiches, salads, steaks, and seafood, just the same as their Route 66 predecessors did during the decades before. Their trade today perpetuates many of the same foodways that their parents and grandparents enjoyed as they took the Mother Road across the Texas Panhandle.

[Prepared for Texas State Historical Association, 4 March 2005.]

## ENDNOTES

1. Michael Wallis. *Route 66: The Mother Road*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990. 5–11.
2. Catherine Gudis. *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Gudis examines the phenomenon of “corridors of consumption” along American highways.
3. Linda Anderson. “Memories of Route 66.” *Route 66 Magazine* 6, no. 1 Winter 1998–99: 10.
4. David L. Nail. *One Short Sleep Past: A Profile of Amarillo in the Thirties*. Canyon, Texas: Staked Plains Press, 1973. 95; Wallis, 131, 133.
5. Truck Stop Café, Amarillo, Tex., *Good Morning: Breakfast Now Being Served* (Eastland, Texas: VC Menus, 1970): menu in personal research files of the author. Ernestine Linck and Joyce Roach make clear the distinction between cafés and restaurants in Texas in their book, *Eats: A Folk History of Texas Foods*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1989. 231–36.
6. Bob Dowell's Café, Amarillo Texas, *Bob Dowell's Café: Fifth at No. Fillmore[,] Amarillo, Texas* (Amarillo: privately printed, ca. 1955): menu in personal research files of the author.
7. Capitol Hotel, Amarillo, Texas, *Snuffy Says*, (Amarillo, Texas: privately printed, ca. 1945): menu, unpagged, in personal research files of the author; Richard Hamm, “Days of Capitol Hotel, \$2 Rooms Gone Forever.” *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe* (Amarillo, Texas), 11 September, 1977, clipping available in “Amarillo Texas, Hotels” Vertical File, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Daryl McKee, “Capitol Hotel Stands as Testimony to Past Elegance.” *Amarillo Globe-Times* (Amarillo, Texas), 1 February 1973. 22.
8. Long Champ Dining Salon, Amarillo, Texas, *If It Swims We Have It! Long Champ Dining Salon[,] AAA[,] on Hwy. 60 & 65[,] Amarillo, Texas[,] Recommended by Duncan Hines*, (Amarillo, Tex., Privately printed, ca. 1950): menu in personal research files of the author;

- H. H. Hutson, *If It Swims—We Have It*[,] *Long Champ*[,] 705 N.E. Eighth in Amarillo[,], U.S.A., (Amarillo, Tex., Privately printed, 1948): paper table placemat in personal research files of the author; Long Champ Dining Salon, Amarillo, Tex., *Recommended by Duncan Hines*[,] *Longchamp*[,] *Recommended by AAA*, Publication 9B-H686 (Chicago: Curt Teich Company, 1949): postcard in personal research files of the author; Long Champ Dining Salon, Amarillo, Tex., *Recommended by Duncan Hines*[,] *Long Champ Dining Salon—East of City on Highway 60 & 66—Amarillo, Texas*, Publication 8B-H70 (Chicago: Curt Teich Company, 1948): postcard in personal research files of the author.
9. Kerry Campbell. “Café Still a Landmark.” *Amarillo Daily News* (Amarillo, Texas), 11 March 1991, A1, 2. (first four quotations); Kerry Campbell. “Route 66 Landmark: Owners Look Back Fondly at Café’s History.” *Amarillo Globe-News* (Amarillo, Texas, ca. 1992), available as clipping in Scrapbook 3, Old Route 66 Association of Texas, McLean, Texas; Jay Firshing. “The Incomparable U-Drop Inn/Tower Station to Be Restored.” *Route 66 Federation News* 7, no. 1, Winter 2001: 9–13 (sixth quotation); Jay Firshing. “News on the U-Drop-Inn Café.” *The 66 News* (Springfield, Ill.), Winter 2000. 18; John Kofton. “My Girl Lou: A Story of Love, the Mother Road & East in 1952.” *Roadsigns* (La Verne, Calif.), 11, no. 1, Winter/Spring 2001: 14 (fifth quotation); Bob Moore. “The U-Drop-Inn: An Art Deco Masterpiece.” *The Mother Road Journal* (Lakewood, Colo.), #10, October 1993: 16; Jimmy J. Pack, Jr. “Images of the U-Drop Inn.” *Route 66 Federation News* 9, no. 4, Autumn 2002: 11–12; Barry Penfound. “Shamrock, Texas” *Route 66 Magazine* 4, no. 3, Summer 1997: 16–18; U-Drop-Inn Café, Shamrock, Texas, *U-Drop-Inn Café*[,] *Shamrock, Texas*[,] *Hy-Way 66 and 83*[,] *Delicious Food Courteously Served*, (n.p.: privately printed, ca. 1940): paper serviette in personal research files of the author.
  10. Marian Clark. “Oklahoma City Is Home to a Route 66 Classic Eatery.” *Route 66 Federation News* 1, no. 2, Autumn 1995: 15–16; Jones Brothers Drive-In, Amarillo, Tex., *The World’s Most Famous Chicken*[,] *Jones Bros. Drive-In*, (n.p.: privately printed, ca. 1945): match cover in possession of the author; Bob Moore. “Chicken in the Rough: Road Food Supreme.” *Route 66 Magazine* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 28–29; Beverly Osborne, Oklahoma City, Okla., *Where You See This Sign, It’s Genuine Chicken in the Rough*, Publication 6B-H2576 ([Chicago: Curt Teich Company, 1946]): postcard in possession of the author.
  11. Jane Bernard and Polly Brown. *American Route 66: Home on the Road*. Santa Fe, N.M.: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2003. 90–91; Mary C. Bounds. “It’s a Feat to Eat This Much Meat.” *Dallas Morn-*

*ing News* (Dallas, Texas), 3 March 1985, A49, 55; Jesse Katz. "Price, and a 72-Ounce Steak, Will Make a Real Texan Out of You." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Fort Worth, Texas), 19 October 1997, I3 (seventh quotation); Larry O'Brien. "Eatin' the (Big Texan) Steak." *Route 66 Magazine* 10, no. 1 Winter 2002/03. 11; Cynthia Puckett. "Big Texan Continues in Lee Family Tradition with Big Plans for Future." *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe* (Amarillo, Texas), 10 February 1991, B5; Laura Raitman. "The Best Little Steak House in Texas." *Route 66 Magazine* 9, no. 2 Spring 2002. 24–27; Jean Simmons. "No Wimpy Burgers Served at Amarillo's Big Texan." *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), 4 February 1990, G2; Bob Stevens. "Touring Route 66: Part 5." *Cars & Parts Corvette* 4, no. 2 February 2001. 54; Rick Storm. "Get Your Kicks: Famous Road Changed Way Nation Traveled." *Amarillo Globe-News* 24 June 2001. A9.



**A typical Sonic Drive-In**