

AT THE CROSSROADS OF AMERICA

By Mitchell Brown

One of America's most notable junctions sits in the quaint Mother Road town of Carthage, Missouri. Here, U.S. 71, or the Jefferson Highway, going north to south, intersected with U.S. Route 66, running east to west, at what is now Garrison Avenue and West Central Avenue. At the height of American

road travel, this significant corner, often referred to as the 'Crossroads of America' was witness to hundreds of automobiles driving in all directions, every day. Over the ensuing years, traffic slowed down with the introduction of interstate highways and the intersection became quiet, mainly serving the local community. Skip several years later, and this well-known crossing is primed to become a focal point for travelers once again.

In 1939, local Arthur Boots decided to build a Streamline Moderne style, four-room motel, with carports, on the convergence of Garrison and Central and christened it Boots Court. His goal was to take advantage of the increasing motoring public brought by Route 66. As travelers pulled up to the intersection, the piece of mid-century roadside architecture loomed into view. At night, its neon green lights cast an incandescent glow on the corner. The motel thrived, expanding to eight rooms, and an additional building with five rooms was added in 1946 under new owners. But as with most local businesses, the motel struggled with deterioration and closures over the ensuing years.

Fast forward over eight decades later, through several ownerships, seasons of disrepair, an escape from the wrecking ball, and partial restoration during the 2000s, this iconic motel now has a revitalized lease on life, stepping boldly into its rightful place as one of the oldest motels on Historic Route 66. In August 2021, the Boots Court Foundation purchased the historic motel, and over the last 15 months, has painstakingly renovated the motel, replacing the roof, sandblasting the outside of the building, and reinstating rooms. In 2022, Boots Court was finally added to the National Register of Historic Places and reopened for the first time in decades, with the full capacity of 13 rooms, stocked with 1940s splendor.



With acquiring the motel, the foundation also purchased additional properties around the area, including a former Sinclair gas station that sat adjacent to the little venue. The station has been converted into the Boots Court office and Route 66 Visitor Center. It will not only serve as a guest check-in venue and a

Carthage and Route 66 information center, but it will also bring a strong sense of community back to the famed corner.

"I believe it was seen as a good way to take something that was not being used, and turn it into something positive, attractive, and useful on our limited stretch of Route 66," said Kim Bausinger, former manager of Boots Court motel.

Information on the history of the Sinclair station is scarce, but what is known is that it was built sometime between 1955 and 1956. Prior to the Foundation procuring it, the station had mostly gathered dust as it shuffled between owners. "It's been vacant, or had various businesses rent it out for a few months and then moved on," said Bausinger. "It's probably most consistently had various food trucks out in front over the last several years. The building has also been used for storage."

The main focus of the restoration on the station's outside was stucco repair and building the carport canopy out front, with plumbing, drywall, painting, and flooring being a priority inside. Plans are also to have green neon lights to match the aesthetic of the Boots Court. The opportunity for the building to be useful for other purposes is also being explored.

"The back of the visitors center has high horizontal windows, leaving a big white wall I could see watching old black and white movies with our guests projected on that big white [space]. Like on the nights when the drive-in movie theater isn't open," said Bausinger.

With the historic Boots Court restored to its original grandeur, and the Sinclair gas station being revived, not to serve gas but memories, this corner of the Mother Road is about to begin a second life; yet another reason for people traveling through to stop and visit for a while and see what America and the Midwest really is all about.

Photograph by Jeremy Morris.