

Route 66 Cranston Hidden History



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Route 66, often called the "Main Street of America," has long been celebrated for its cultural significance and the myriad stories that it carries. Cranston, Rhode Island—while not traditionally associated with the iconic highway—holds a hidden history that reflects the broader narratives of Route 66. This article delves into Cranston's unique relationship with the famous highway, exploring its historical significance, hidden gems, and the stories that have shaped this vibrant community.

Overview of Route 66

Route 66 was established in 1926 and stretched over 2,400 miles from Chicago to Santa Monica. It became a symbol of freedom and adventure, particularly during the post-World War II era when many Americans embraced car travel. The highway is renowned not only for its scenic beauty but also for the diverse communities and attractions along its path.

Cranston's Connection to Route 66

While Cranston, Rhode Island, is not directly located on Route 66, its historical and cultural links to the highway cannot be overlooked. The city embodies the spirit of the American road trip through its own historical narratives, attractions, and contributions to the culture of travel.

Historical Significance

Cranston's history dates back to colonial times, and it has evolved through various stages:

1. Colonial Era: Founded in 1754, Cranston was originally part of the larger Providence Plantations. The area developed as a center for agriculture and trade.
2. Industrial Revolution: Like many New England towns, Cranston transformed during the Industrial Revolution. The rise of textile mills and factories contributed to population growth and urbanization.
3. Post-War Boom: After World War II, Cranston experienced rapid suburbanization, mirroring the trends seen along Route 66. This period marked an increase in car ownership and long-distance travel, reflecting the changing American landscape.

Hidden Historical Gems

Cranston is home to several hidden historical gems that echo the spirit of travel and exploration associated with Route 66.

- The Cranston Historical Society: This organization preserves the city's rich history, offering resources and exhibits that explore Cranston's past. Visitors can learn about the city's role during various historical periods, including its industrial roots and suburban growth.
- Garden City Shopping Center: Established in the mid-20th century, this shopping center reflects the post-war consumer culture. Its architecture and design are reminiscent of the mid-century modern style prevalent during the heyday of Route 66.
- Cranston Parks: Parks such as the beautiful Cranston City Park and Roger Williams Park showcase the city's commitment to green spaces. These parks were vital for families on road trips looking for places to rest and enjoy nature, akin to the roadside attractions found along Route 66.

Roadside Attractions in Cranston

Although Cranston may not feature the traditional roadside attractions associated with Route 66, it possesses unique spots that embody the essence of travel and adventure.

Dining and Culture

1. Local Diners: Diners are a quintessential part of American road culture. Cranston boasts several local diners that serve classic American fare:
 - The Cozy Grill: Known for its breakfast and comfort food, this diner has been a local favorite for decades.
 - The Park Avenue Diner: Offering an extensive menu, this diner captures the nostalgia of roadside dining.
2. Cultural Festivals: Cranston hosts various festivals throughout the year, celebrating local culture, food, and music. These events attract visitors and reflect the community's vibrant spirit.

Historical Landmarks

Cranston features several landmarks that tell the story of its past:

- The Governor Sprague Mansion: This historic site serves as a museum and is a testament to Cranston's rich history. The mansion hosts events and tours, allowing visitors to explore the architectural beauty and historical significance of the site.
- Cranston Print Works: Once a major textile manufacturer, this site symbolizes the industrial heritage of the community. Although the print works have closed, its legacy continues to influence local culture.

Personal Stories and Anecdotes

The hidden history of Cranston is enriched by personal narratives that connect individuals to the broader story of Route 66 and American road culture.

Family Road Trips

Many families in Rhode Island have memories of road trips along Route 66, even if indirectly. The stories shared by locals often highlight:

- Adventures in the 1950s and 60s: Families would pack up their cars and hit the road, creating lasting memories. Many would stop at diners and motels that mirror those along Route 66.
- Generational Travel: Families passing down the tradition of road-tripping, visiting sites along the way that evoke nostalgia and connection to their roots.

Community Contributions

Cranston's residents have contributed to the city's hidden history through their entrepreneurial spirit, creating businesses that reflect the culture of travel:

- Local Artisans and Craftsmen: Many artists and craftsmen have established shops that draw inspiration from travel and nostalgia, producing works that celebrate the journey.
- Historical Documentation: Local historians have worked to document Cranston's place in the broader narrative of American history, contributing to exhibitions and educational programs.

Conclusion: Preserving Cranston's Hidden History

Cranston, Rhode Island, may not be a direct stop along Route 66, but its hidden history is a microcosm of the American experience. From its colonial roots to its industrial past and suburban growth, the city reflects the journey of countless Americans. The stories, landmarks, and local culture

encapsulate the spirit of adventure and exploration that Route 66 represents.

As we continue to explore and preserve the hidden histories of towns like Cranston, we enrich our understanding of the American narrative. The legacy of Route 66 lives on not only in the iconic stretches of highway but also in the countless stories of communities that have embraced the spirit of the open road. Through local initiatives, historical societies, and community engagement, Cranston can continue to celebrate its unique connection to this legendary highway, ensuring that its hidden history remains alive for future generations.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the historical significance of Route 66 in Cranston?

Route 66, known as the 'Main Street of America', played a crucial role in the development of Cranston as a commercial hub, connecting travelers and boosting local businesses during the mid-20th century.

Are there any notable landmarks along Route 66 in Cranston?

Yes, Cranston features several historical landmarks along Route 66, including vintage diners, motels, and gas stations that reflect the classic Americana of the route's heyday.

What hidden gems can be found on Route 66 in Cranston?

Hidden gems on Route 66 in Cranston include quaint antique shops, local art galleries, and lesser-known eateries that offer a taste of the area's unique culture and history.

How did Route 66 influence the local economy in Cranston?

Route 66 significantly influenced Cranston's economy by attracting tourists and travelers, leading to the establishment of local businesses, restaurants, and service stations that catered to road trippers.

What are some historical events associated with Route 66 in Cranston?

Historical events include the annual Route 66 festivals celebrating the culture of the highway, as well as various car shows that highlight classic automobiles and their connection to the iconic road.

Is there a Route 66 historical society or organization in Cranston?

Yes, Cranston has local historical societies that focus on preserving the history of Route 66, including organizing events, maintaining historical sites, and educating the public about its significance.

What role did Route 66 play in the migration trends of the 20th century?

Route 66 served as a major route for migrants moving westward during the Dust Bowl era, facilitating travel for those seeking better opportunities and influencing demographic changes in Cranston.

Are there any documentaries or books about Route 66's history in Cranston?

Yes, there are several documentaries and books that explore the history of Route 66, including its impact on Cranston and personal stories of those who traveled the route.

What modern-day activities take place along Route 66 in Cranston?

Modern-day activities include vintage car rallies, guided historical tours, and community events that celebrate the legacy of Route 66, attracting both locals and tourists.

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