

Lincoln Highway brought tourist camps

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 27 June 2013 13:23 -



Two places offered locally.

With the creation of the Lincoln Highway in 1913, accommodations for budget travelers and motels sprouted up along the transcontinental highway.

Gothenburg was no exception.

One motel, later turned into a tourist camp, offered gas, groceries, laundry services and a swimming pool. The other, developed by the local Campfire Girls organization, promised “summertime beauty in a cool spot” next to Lake Helen.

While writing about family history, former Gothenburg resident Richard Gronewold described a motel complex on the west edge of town built by Bill Sievers which was along the Lincoln Highway.

Richard said the complex, with 17 units, an area for tents and trailers, showers, store, gas station and show room for new cars was for sale.

“The Sievers decided they wanted to move to California and start a business there,” wrote Gronewold, who is now deceased. “Somehow they got the idea that Dad would like to invest both time and money in their motel.”

His parents, Herman and Jennie Gronewold, mortgaged the family farm to buy the property and moved into a house on the motel grounds in the early 1930s.

Lincoln Highway brought tourist camps

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 27 June 2013 13:23 -

Open from 6 a.m.-10 p.m., Richard said everyone had a job.

“People checked in and out at all hours. Rooms had to be cleaned, the grounds kept mowed, the filling station had to be attended, the gas truck out on the road to deliver fuel to farmers, tires had to be changed, the swimming pool needed constant attention and now and then we would sell a new car.”

Across the street was a dance hall that the Gronewolds used to store used cars.

Richard said Jennie did the laundry “for the camp as we called it” since most tourists carried their own bedding.

During the spring, summer and early fall, Richard said “there seemed to be no end to tourists” traveling the Lincoln Highway.



“People of all strata of society seemed to have travel fever,” he wrote. “Some drove cars that would hardly run while others rode in the very best. Some had their own chauffeurs.”

While the road bed was dirt and gravel, Richard said many travelers had problems with the dust. Eventually it was paved.

At some point, the Gronewolds sold the motel/camp to Bart and Ora Dunivent and moved back to their farm southwest of town.

Lincoln Highway brought tourist camps

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 27 June 2013 13:23 -

The Dunivents called their business “Dunivent’s Modern Tourist Camp” and hung a sign advertising a filling station, groceries and auto accessories.

Helen (Hines) Neel of Gothenburg was a niece of the Dunivents and remembers the tourist camp.

“Kids in those days, who grew up on a farm, didn’t have swimming suits because there was no place to swim,” Neel said.

No problem when the Hines family came to town because Ora had a bunch of bathing suits in different sizes she loaned her nieces and nephews and tourists.

“She always dug them out and we put ’ em on to go in the pool,” she said.

Neel, who’s 92, also remembers candy and ice cream in the camp store that she and her siblings didn’t go home without.

And the tourist camp rooms?

“Each one was very little,” she recalled.

Neel doesn’t remember what happened to the tourist camp after the Dunivents moved to California.

Eventually the pool was filled which Richard said was done by the highway commission.

Lincoln Highway brought tourist camps

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 27 June 2013 13:23 -

Most likely, the tourist camp at Lafayette Park was available long before the motel/camp on the Lincoln Highway.



According to the Gothenburg Area History book, the Campfire Girls wanted a camping site for themselves and for travelers transformed into a park.

They formed the Camp Fire Girls Park Association, sold shares, had fund raisers and built such things as a pier, community fire place, a crow's nest structure and at some point a screened pavilion.

On Sept. 6, 1918, Lafayette Park was dedicated and a rustic sign with the park's name and the Campfire Girls was hung over the entrance .

Photographs loaned by the Gothenburg Historical Museum show another sign at the park advertising a tourist camp.

The history book also notes that 3,400 registered visitors used the park by 1930 and 4,410 in 1936.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636