

Route 20 or the Great Western Turnpike

U.S. Route 20 is one of the oldest transcontinental highways. Stretching across eleven states, it crosses four time zones, beginning in the east near Boston, Massachusetts and ending in the west at Newport Oregon. Covering 3,365 miles, it is our nation's longest continuous highway, and the only transcontinental highway which cuts through New York.

U.S. Route 20 can actually trace its early beginnings to animal paths, Indian trails, and early turnpikes. With westward expansion and the industrial age, over time it grew. What is now Route 20, was chartered as the "First Western Turnpike", and has also been called the "Cherry Valley Turnpike". It experienced its biggest boom during the golden years of the automobile. When Henry Ford produced the Model T, a car that was affordable to the masses, people from almost all walks of life were able to venture outside of their own towns and villages. This was the beginning of modern growth for Route 20, and from 1925 to 1955 Route 20 became the major means from going east to west and west to east and all points in between.

In the early days of motoring, there were no motels, and hotels only existed in the major cities, so when night fell upon tired and road weary travelers, most just pulled off the road and erected tents or slept within the car itself. Many towns and villages allowed travelers to set up camp in their town parks. Eventually fields near town were set aside specifically for this purpose, and thus the "auto camp" or "tourist camp" as they were also sometimes called was born. Lacking any and all amenities, these were basically just a clear and open field where motorists could set up a tent or two and spend the night or a few days before continuing on their journey. To provide a safer place for a typical traveling family to spend the night, auto camps soon evolved into small cabin colonies called "motor courts". These motor courts were the forerunner to the modern motel and had small hastily built cabins that provided a more home like appearance, and offered a safer place to stay than tenting or sleeping in the car out in the field of the auto camp.

From 1954 to 1956, the New York State Thruway was built, and the golden era for Route 20, and for motoring as a whole was changed forever. Travelers heading to a destination were now less concerned with what was along the way, and more concerned with getting there, and getting there quicker. Motorists could drive faster on the Thruway which bypassed all the

towns and cities across the state. Although travel times dropped going from one destination to another, the construction of the Thruway resulted in an economic decline for many rural towns and villages.