

History of the Cucamonga Service Station

Introduction

The Cucamonga Service Station is one of only a few original buildings remaining on Route 66 in California. The station was built in 1915 as a refueling and service stop for motorists, as well as being of service to the local agricultural community. It became a Richfield distributor in the 1930's and remained so until the 1960's. After its closure in the early 1970's the station became a beloved "unofficial" landmark for its unique architecture and the nostalgic memories it brought to mind for those who saw it. But without someone to maintain it, the station began to deteriorate.

William Harvey and the Cucamonga Garage and Cyclery

1910 to June 1914

William Harvey was born in 1880 in Illinois. By 1913 he had moved to Cucamonga where he owned and operated the Cucamonga Garage and Cyclery on Foothill Blvd next door to the site of the present day station Cucamonga Service Station. Harvey serviced not only bicycles but farm equipment and automobiles.



William Harvey in front of the original Cucamonga Garage and Cyclery.
Photo courtesy of the Harvey family.

Building of the Cucamonga Garage - June 1914

In June of 1914 William Harvey decided to expand his business and build a larger garage. He purchased the lot next to the Cyclery and had a garage erected on the site. Harvey had a gas pump out front and a soda shop in the garage where he sold ice cream. He also supplied gas and oil to the many farms in the area. If you owned a farm, driving your tractor to the gas station or hauling gas cans back and forth to your farm just wasn't practical so many farms had their own gas pump. One of the services Harvey offered was to make gas deliveries to the local farms. This service was maintained by subsequent owners.



Harvey's Cucamonga Garage. c 1914
Note the soda shop awning on the right.
Photo courtesy of the Harvey family.

William Harvey and the Cucamonga Service Station 1915 – 1934

Business must have been good because soon Harvey decided to expand again. In November of 1915 He purchased the land behind the garage and had had the garage moved to the back of the lot. Local tradition says that he hired Henry Klusman, who built many of the early structures in Cucamonga, to build a 400 sq. ft. service station in front in the Spanish Colonial style which had become



very popular at the time.. He also expanded from one gas pump to two islands with three pumps each. The front façade of the garage was redesigned to match the architectural style of the station. A restroom building was also added on the East side of the lot as well as large arched entrance facades on each side of the station to make it appear larger and provide a more interesting and grander entrance to the garage in the rear.



The garage after moving it to the rear of the lot and giving it a new Spanish Colonial façade to match the architectural design of the station.

Subsequent Owners and Business Partners

Ancil Morris began as a mechanic at the garage under William Harvey. The city directory lists him as a mechanic beginning in 1928. He became the owner sometime around 1935. Under Morris the station became a Richfield distributor. He also took on a partner by the name of Arvid Lewis to run the garage around 1945.

This arrangement between Morris and Lewis seemed to last through the 1960s but by 1968 the station was in serious financial trouble. Ancil Morris died in 1970 at the age of 75 and the station closed soon after his death. The Morris family retained ownership of the property after his death until they sold it in 1986.

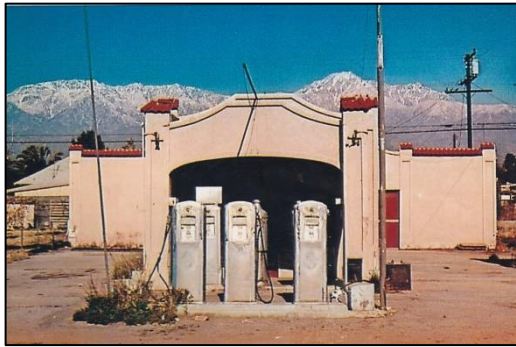
ROUTE 66 and the Cucamonga Service Station

U.S. Route 66 was actually part of a larger national highway system planned for and started in the 1920s. The original plan was to create continuous highways throughout the country that

interconnected small and large towns and would allow an improvement of trade and travel to many areas that were then largely served by trains.

Commissioned in 1926, U.S. Route 66 served travelers throughout the migration from the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression, World War II and into the 1950s. The “Mother Road” connected towns and transported people and goods 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In California, Route 66 came through the Mojave Desert and through a mountain pass into what is now known as the Inland Empire region of California. From San Bernardino it then followed what is now 5th Street which becomes Foothill Blvd from Rialto through Azusa. While Route 66 and others like it around the country had served their purpose to transport people and goods more easily, after World War II and with the boom of the 1950s, it became clear that a more robust highway system was needed.

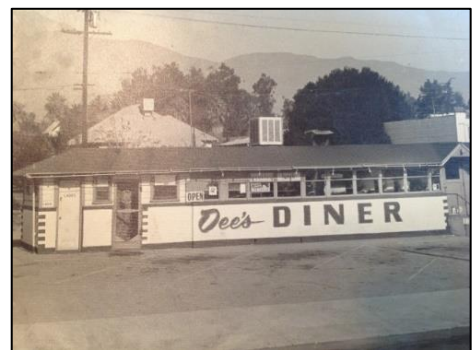
Dwight Eisenhower had seen first-hand, during WW II, how efficiently the German autobahn highway system enabled the Germans to rapidly move troops and materials throughout the country. As President, during the 1950s, he wanted to build a similar system in the United States that would serve the motoring needs of the ever growing number of automobiles as baby-boomer families proliferated and moved about the country



While the building of the Interstate Highway System modernized how the public travels it had the unfortunate consequence of bypassing the many towns, roadside attractions, campgrounds, motels and service stations that motorists enjoyed stopping at along the way. As the modern highways grew ever more popular these roadside facilities and attractions closed, fell into disrepair, and were forgotten about, including, the Cucamonga Service Station.

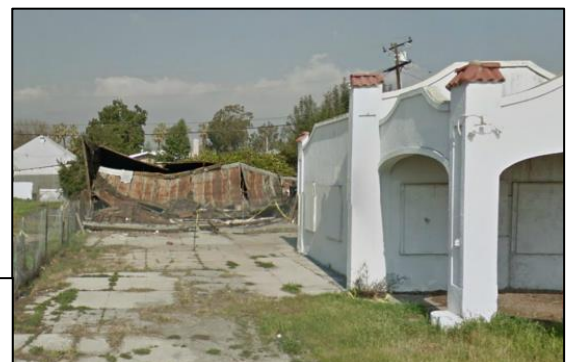
1972 – 2013 Saving the Station

A group of local citizens and the local historical society were concerned that the station could disappear forever as Foothill Blvd continued to develop. Indeed, another local spot, Dees Diner, which was next door to the station, had recently been lost to the developer’s bulldozers.



It was too late to save Dees but not the station. In 2009 citizens and the Historical Preservation Association of Rancho Cucamonga rallied together and petitioned the city council to designate the station as an historical landmark. It was the first and only time the city council gave the historic landmark designation to a property without the owner’s consent.

The ongoing decades of neglect however had not been kind to the garage and after a severe storm in 2011 the roof of the garage caved in. The city had no choice but to demolish the garage out of concerns for safety.



The collapsed garage behind the gas station.

Route 66 Inland Empire California

Lamar Advertising, who had by now become the owner of the property, realized that with its historical landmark designation, they couldn't do much with it. After all, they are not in the business of restoring historic properties. Route 66 Inland Empire California (IECA) a 501 c (3) nonprofit organization, was formed in 2012 to identify and preserve significant sites along Route 66 in the Inland Empire. This was just what Lamar needed. They donated the property to Route 66 IECA in 2013 with the only stipulation that they be allowed to keep the electronic billboard that they had already erected on the side of the lot. This was a win – win situation for everyone. Lamar was able to be a good citizen to the community and got a tax write off for donating the property to a nonprofit organization and Route 66 IECA and the community got to keep their station.

Restoration and Preservation 2013 - 2015

Almost immediately the community came to the rescue of their station, and just in time. A hole in the roof had allowed water to rot the wood in the roof and many of the wall studs, especially on the west wall under the hole. Much of the materials and labor were offered at heavily discounted rates or donated at no cost. Crews of volunteers and local contractors donated hundreds of hours of labor and materials and the association went into fundraising mode. Not only did the community donate money, labor and materials, but they also came by with donations for the museum. The city government was also instrumental in the restoration, providing assistance with needed permits and construction guidance. As the decades of old paint layers were stripped off the original Richfield colors of yellow and blue were revealed. The colors were carefully matched and the station was restored to those vibrant colors. It was then topped off with a donated original Richfield sign.

Grand Opening

By October 2015 the restored Cucamonga Service Station was ready for its grand opening to the public. The grand opening was attended by the public and city dignitaries. The reopened station now operates as a museum, offering exhibits of local history, Route 66 history, as well as items of antique and historic petroliana.



But the work isn't done yet.

Plans and fundraising are underway to rebuild the garage which collapsed and was demolished in 2011. The rebuilt garage will serve to greatly expand the museum displays and provide a meeting space for community groups. It will also feature a sidewalk of commemorative inscribed bricks.