

Still a Grand View: the Ship Hotel and the Lincoln Highway

By Brian A. Butko



1920s-era pioneers at Grand View Point Hotel, near Bedford, Pa.



IMAGINE driving toward the East Coast in the 1930s from Pittsburgh. You'd go with your parents in their big black sedan, maybe a Ford. You'd head down Route 30, the Lincoln Highway, past Greensburg, Ligonier, and then into the Allegheny Mountains. And just as the ride was beginning to get tiresome, your car topped a hill, rounded a curve, and there it was, a steamship. A steamship! It was too good to pass by... "Let's stop!"

For almost 60 years people have stopped at the ship hotel at Grandview Point to "See 3 States and 7 Counties," as the sign on the ship's hull proclaims to all passing motorists. Though a fair amount of visitors stop today, it was perhaps the most popular attraction on the highway from the 1920s through the 1950s, before the interstate highway system dominated travel considerations. It was a time when people did not race to their destination, when the success of a trip was measured by the enjoyment of the journey, not just the number of miles accomplished per hour. Roadside entrepreneurs, competing for the business of these new adventurers, tried to make their places as eye-catching and irresistible as possible. Unique as it was, the ship hotel was a typical roadside attraction of the era, so its story is entwined with the road it was on, the Lincoln Highway.

U.S. Route 30 in Pennsylvania is actually just the most recent name for a road whose history stretches back hundreds of years. It is a combination of what were originally various Indian and trader paths crossing southern Pennsylvania. Paths from Bedford to Pittsburgh were used when General John Forbes removed trees and stumps to carve the Forbes Road across the mountains of Pennsylvania in 1758. The eastern paths were improved even earlier for traders and farmers fanning out from Philadelphia. After some course changes, the southerly connection of routes became known as the Pennsylvania Road, later consisting of many privately run turnpikes. This succession of stone surfaced toll roads carried wagons and stagecoaches to the quickly developing west for the next 100 years. Only the rise of canals and railroads in the 1840s diminished the traffic.

After the turn of the century, automobiles shared the road with wagons and stagecoaches, and the companies that owned some of the turnpikes on the Pennsylvania Road made minor improvements. The Pennsylvania Road, however, was the

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exception in America, for most roads were not improved and, more importantly, most did not connect places but simply radiated from towns. The few trails that were improved were at best graded and graveled, making travel over them difficult, and travel in wet weather impossible. Even the Pennsylvania Road saw only 50 cars pass one of its tollgates in 1905, though at the time this was considered to be a large number. Many civic groups and automobile organizations pushed for better roads, but organized action was slow in coming.

It was in this environment that Carl Fisher first conceived of a road to cross the United States. Fisher, who later developed Miami Beach, was already well known in the auto industry for pioneering the Indianapolis Speedway and for founding the Prest-O-Lite lighting system for cars. He knew auto manufacturers looked to road improvements for stimulating sales and that, as an avid motorist himself, car owners wanted improved roads and signs. The enthusiastic Fisher was able to get pledges of financial and manual support from most of the top auto men and local support from towns hopeful to be on the route, leading to the formation in 1913 of the Lincoln Highway Association. Its official purpose was to establish a continuously paved, toll-free road from New York to San Francisco as a memorial to Abraham Lincoln. But even more, the association's officers hoped to educate the public on the value of the highways and their improvement. This they did, for as people saw the improved sections of the Lincoln Highway,

they bought more cars, and as traffic increased so did the demand for improvements.

The Lincoln Highway was not a new road but rather a system of continuing improvements to existing roads. The highway was marked its entire length by red, white, and blue bands at a time when road signs were virtually nonexistent. Recalling her 1914 cross-country trip, Effie Gladding wrote that she found the markers "sometimes painted on telephone poles, sometimes put up by way of advertisement over garage doors or swinging on hotel signboards; sometimes painted on little stakes, like croquet goals, scattered along over the great spaces of the desert. We learned to love the red, white, and blue, and the familiar big L which told us that we were on the right road."

Trouble arose when bands designating other trails were painted on the same poles. Sometimes a half-dozen routes or more were on the same trail, and motorists struggled to find their route's marking. The Lincoln Highway began using porcelainized metal signs, as did other highways, but the haphazard marking of trails and the swelling list of named highways were big obstacles for

Early 20th century

early travellers. Not until 1925, after the government had begun to finance road improvements, did a federal numbering system erase all named

highways. Pennsylvania delayed for three years, calling the road both the Lincoln Highway and Pennsylvania Route 1 until 1928. It then became U.S. Route 30 in Pennsylvania and much of the nation, but people still called it the Lincoln Highway.

The Lincoln Highway through the state generally followed the course of the Pennsylvania Road but dipped down from Lancaster to travel a shorter route through York, Gettysburg and Bedford before continuing through Ligonier to Pittsburgh. The last toll section on the road in Pennsylvania was eliminated in 1918, but what drew many people to the Lincoln Highway was the sense of adventure. As the automobile became available to a wider range of people, here was a road that offered a chance to cross the country like the early pioneers and to still return home within a week or two. The Lincoln Highway was not much different from the pioneer roads, for it often was little more than two wagon tracks across a field or over a mountain. Within 10 years improvements would make the road much tamer, but the Lincoln Highway was already as ingrained in American mythology as the early wagon roads.

The first boom in filling stations, hotels and

restaurants — businesses suited to the new adventurers — had occurred about 1915. One of the attractions on the Lincoln Highway in Pennsylvania was Grand View Point Lookout, which the east-bound traveller came upon shortly after crossing Bald Knob Summit and entering Bedford County. This hill, which had been a problem for wagon traffic, now drew motorists who began stopping to enjoy the breathtaking view. The mountainside curve was at first no wider than the rest of the highway. Early motoring guides warned drivers to park their cars far back and walk to the edge, which had a short stone wall. A rock wall remains, and on a clear day one can see over 60 miles, encompassing Bedford, Blair, Fulton, Franklin, and Somerset counties in Pennsylvania; Alleghany County in Maryland; and Preston County in West Virginia. Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, is to the left and Lovers Leap in Cumberland, Maryland, is on the right.

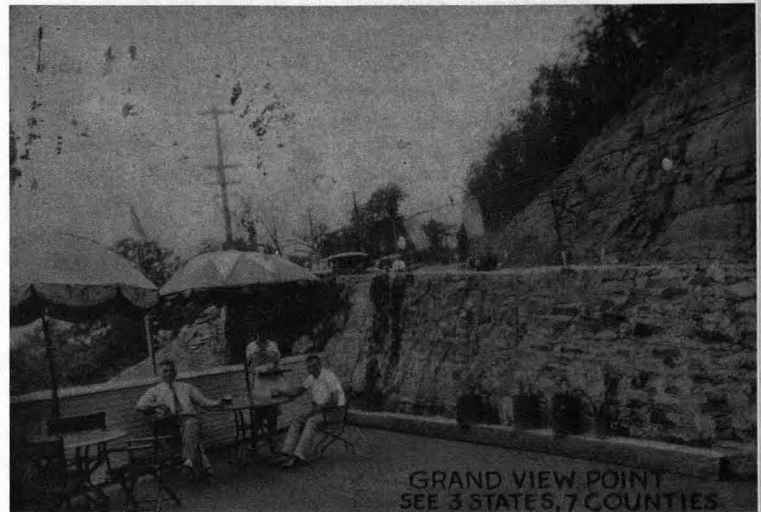
It was also in the mid-teens that Herbert Paulson left Holland to come to America. Paulson, now deceased, was the builder and owner of the ship hotel, and his son, Walter Paulson of Johnstown, and the builder's only grandchild, Clara Gardner of Bedford, recall basic facts about the hotel's early years. Herbert Paulson first settled in Alliance, Ohio, but soon moved to Pittsburgh to work in a steel mill as a tool and die maker. He then opened a German social club and a theater on Pittsburgh's South Side before moving to New Baltimore, Somerset County. He opened hotels there and in Cleveland, then in 1927 bought a hot dog stand already operating at Grand View Point. The stand did good business with travellers and highway crews working on the road. Paulson rode the entire length of the road one summer with his wife and two daughters.

The state improved much of the highway in the 1920s, including a widening of the road at Grand View Point. In 1927 a new stone wall was built with two castle-like turrets on the ends and four at an opening in the middle. Paulson moved his stand to the opening in the wall, so people could sit while eating. He soon decided

to make his building permanent, and at the wall opening he put up a square building with castle turrets on the roof that re-

sembled the stone turrets. The building had four stories, three below road level. When finished, he called his place the Grand View Point Hotel. Rooms started at \$1 and the 24-hour restaurant featured a chicken waffle dinner, a local German specialty. Even the brand of ice cream at the restaurant — Castles — complimented the outdoor em-

bellishments. Rooms were on the lower floors while the restaurant and gift shop were on the top floor at road level, with windows all around. A lookout deck on one corner with various telescopes was soon added. The restrooms were down the hill on a



long walk that passed fountains and goldfish ponds.

A gas station across the road, the Grand View Point Service Station, completed the castle motif with a turret on its roof. It had three pumps and free water for motorists, although the water soon became 5¢ a bucket: water was hard to get on the mountain, but that's exactly what many of the primitive cars needed after climbing the mountains. And if your car did make it to the gas station, there was still the danger it would be smashed by an occasional rockslide.

With the Lincoln Highway still being the only paved road running coast to coast, business was excellent and it was soon time to expand. Paulson wished to make his building more attractive and

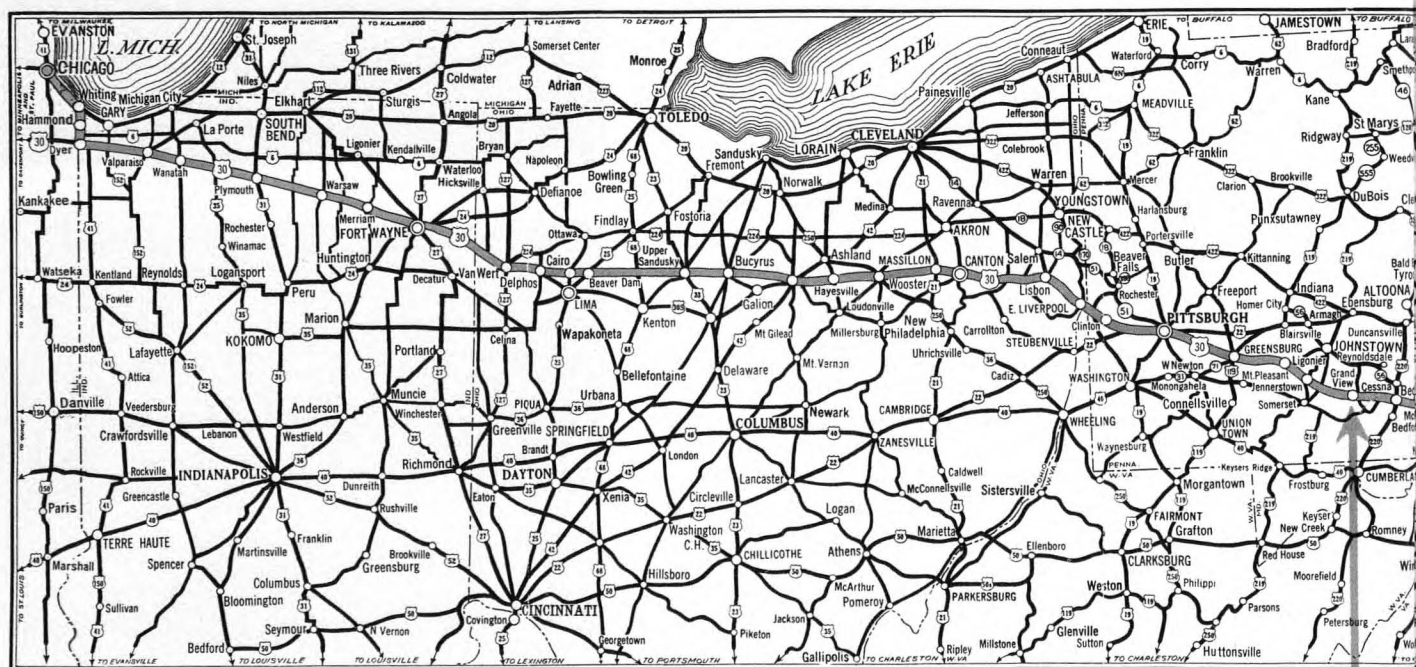
1920s

settled on two ideas, both inspired by the magnificent view. One idea was to build a full castle, since the mountains peeking through the early morning fog looked like a view from a European castle. His other idea was to build a ship, since the fog and mountains reminded him of the gently rolling waves of the sea. He settled on this idea partly because the tapered ends of a ship would not block as much of the view from the road. His love of the sea was the other reason. He would eventually cross the Atlantic 30 times, returning to Holland every two years. (His love of the sea already had earned him the nickname "Captain.")

Construction of the ship began in 1930 and took two years to complete. Three steel I-beams had been buried under the roadbed when it was

widened at the curve. The I-beams were connected to the building to anchor it to the mountain, but the ship still slipped three times during construction. "The state was afraid it would slide," recalls Walter Paulson, "but my father told them, 'It's my property: either you let me build it or you buy the property.'" Eighteen steel piers were then sunk over 30 feet into the rock beneath the building to keep the ship from tumbling down. Metal from junked autos was processed and used to cover the ship's exterior.

When the grand opening came on Memorial Day 1932 the S.S. Grand View Point Hotel really looked like a steamship. A bow and stern were added to the two ends of the original building, and a fifth floor had staterooms and outside decks. On



Shawnee Dam—Near Grand View Point Hotel

The Lincoln Highway (U. S. 30), along which the S. S. Grand View Point Hotel is located, is perhaps the best known route crossing the American continent. Its wide safe construction, easy grades and banked curves make it a road of never ending delight.

Scenic and historic attractions along this route have made it one of the most popular between East and West and those who travel it once return time and

time again to enjoy its marvelous scenery and its hazardless traffic.

One of the outstanding tourists objectives in the world is at Gettysburg (just one hundred miles east of S. S. Grand View Point Hotel) and every year is visited by hundreds of thousands of people. It is an historic shrine that every American should see, and travel over such splendid highways as the Lincoln, makes it a pleasure as well as an educationally worthwhile trip.

Spanning Turtle Creek, the Lincoln Highway (sixty-five miles west of S. S. Grand View Point Hotel) crosses over the great Westinghouse Bridge, a marvel of engineering science. A few miles west lies the great industrial city of Pittsburgh, steel center of the world.

You will enjoy the safe wide ribbons of concrete and a stopover at S. S. Grand View Point Hotel will be long and pleasantly remembered. Make a complete inspection of the Ship in the Allegheny Mountains!



MOTOR MILEAGES TO S. S. GRAND VIEW

	Miles	
Altoona, Pa. (via Bedford)	53	Gr
Atlantic City, N. J.	270	Ha
Atlanta, Georgia	715	Ja
Baltimore, Maryland	145	Ma
Bedford, Pa.	17	Ph
Chambersburg, Pa.	71	Pi
Chicago, Ill.	545	Ne
Cincinnati, Ohio	372	Sc
Cleveland, Ohio	212	St
Cumberland, Md.	48	Wa
Detroit, Mich.	380	Wa
Fort Worth, Texas	1425	Wa
Gettysburg, Pa.	100	Wa

The Lions Meet Here 1st and 3rd Mondays, 7:30 O'clock

the top were two smokestacks and at the prow was a big black anchor. An estimated 500,000 visitors stopped on the dedication day. The Bedford High School Band and a small local German band played, but the big highlight, recalls Paulson, was the bouquet dropped from an airplane onto the ship's deck.

Motorists immediately found the new design alluring. With cars more dependable by the early 1930s, people were no longer stopping just to water their overheated radiators. This gave them more time to enjoy the view, have a soda, and look over the mighty ship out of water.

When entering the ship one still passed between the four stone turrets, but they were cut down to wall level and supported the entrance pillars. The

two turrets at the ends of the wall were covered with wood to make two small lighthouses. Once inside, many surprises awaited the visitor. To the right, in the bow, was the gift shop, which included an array of souvenirs from around the world. Specialties included American Indian jewelry and moc-

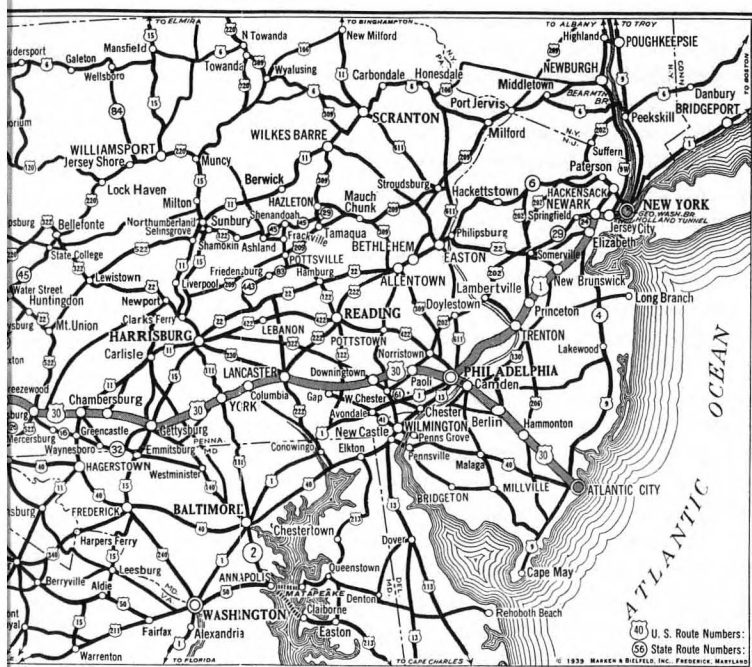
casins, which had first caught Paulson's eye in the West on his cross-country trip. To the visitor's left was the main dining room and a marble soda fountain with tall

1930s 1940s

mirrors behind it. Nautical touches filled the room: anchors were carved into the backs of chairs and life preservers were hung on the walls. On the far wall, on either side of a grandfather clock and a portrait of George Washington, hung paintings of Grand View Point. One pictured the earlier stand behind the four turrets and the other showed a current view of the new ship. One of the most beautiful features was the nautical mural that circled the ceiling. These paintings of boats and lighthouses and the ocean actually told the story of the "Captain's" trips to Holland. The banquet room at the stern resembled the dining room. (In later years it featured a small mural of a ship's deck with 11 sailors said to be members of the S.S. Grand View Orchestra that played in the hotel's lounge during the 1930s.) Both rooms had a panoramic view of the hills and valleys. On the road side of the stern was a small cocktail lounge, popular with both locals and night travellers. A guest book at the cash register accumulated thousands of signatures per year. Among the celebrities who signed in were Clara Bow, Mary Pickford, Henry Ford, J.P. Morgan, Joan Crawford, Rudy Vallee, Lillian Gish, Greta Garbo, and Buddy Rogers.

The top floor had the two outdoor decks, both covered with canvas roofs and sporting free telescopes. On the bow was a big ship's wheel with a floating compass and a steam control. A lobby inside the upper floor had a large skylight. There were also 13 elegant rooms, termed "1st Class," including four suites with private baths. All rooms, including the "2nd class" rooms on the lower floors, had hot and cold running water and steam heat provided by five furnaces in the basement. The rate was \$2, or \$4 for rooms with a private bath. All employees lived in the ship and used the rooms just above the basement. At its peak about 40 people shared these dorm-like quarters that they jokingly referred to as "steerage."

Other tourist attractions sprung up all along the Lincoln Highway. It was no longer just the downtown businesses along the highway that vied for the



VIEW POINT HOTEL

	Miles
Burg, Pa.	50
arg, Pa.	125
ille, Fla.	1035
ellsburg, Pa.	48
phia, Pa.	216
h, Pa.	80
rk City.	315
, Mo.	690
cisco, Cal.	1325
ton, D. C.	152
ton, Pa.	92
g, W. Va.	140



The Eternal Light Peace Monument—Gettysburg, Pa.

The S. S. Grand View Point Hotel is open throughout the year and offers complete food and beverage service at all hours of the day until midnight. Clean, comfortable surroundings, modern rooms—reliable touring information—Courteous, accommodating help.

traveller's dollar. Anyone who had enough room for an overnight guest or a gas pump went into business. There was the Lighthouse Restaurant in North Versailles, large enough that it could have guided the ship hotel into port. The Buvelt Inn Service Station east of Greensburg had a lunchroom, cabins, and Texaco gas. At the top of Bald Knob Summit was Minick's Hotel, which had a restaurant, cottages, and eight gas pumps. On the other side of Grand View Point was Rus's Place at Tull's Hill, which seemed to be a house with a giant roof added to overhang all sides, and another set of gas pumps. On Bedford's outskirts sat Koontz's Coffee Pot, where you could fill up your car with "White Flash" gasoline at Bert Koontz's Atlantic station and fill up yourself with lunch in his giant silver coffee pot. Just past Breezewood was another popular lookout spot, Bill's Place. Bill's sat on top of Ray's Hill and had 10 gas pumps, an outdoor gift shop, and what Bill claimed was the smallest post office in the United States. It was 6 feet by 8 feet and served six people. Bill's also had a tower to draw tourists in search of a better view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Nearing larger cities, tourists found even more roadside businesses such as motor courts and the new streamlined diners.

As the competition increased, the S.S. Grand View Point Hotel tried to keep pace. Dances were held on the back deck to draw the locals and a brand new lounge, the Coral Room, was added. Removing the soda fountain and closing in the front pillars later enlarged the lounge. The lounge and dining room also got brand new Wurlitzer "bubbler" jukeboxes, and to outdo mountaintop competition a 20 foot long brass telescope was added. It supposedly was the world's largest outdoor telescope at the time.

The ship's name changed in the 1940s to the S.S. Grand View Hotel and although it continued to draw crowds, the times were changing. The Pennsylvania Turnpike opened in 1940 and people found they could cross the state on this limited-access road much faster than on Route 30. Not only were the mountain grades reduced, but the separated four-lane made travel much safer. The Turnpike was considered the finest road in America at the time, though it only ran 160 miles from Harrisburg to, interestingly enough, Route 30 at Irwin. The Turnpike and the interstates of the 1950s that it inspired took away much of the out-of-state traffic that passed the ship.

Many towns on the Lincoln Highway came to depend on tourist business, as did people living near the road. Away from the road, however, the countryside remained unchanged. Bedford County was rural long after the highway came through. By 1950, when federal census takers considered only .5

percent of Allegheny County's residences rural farms, 30 percent of Bedford County's residences were farms. Even today Bedford County remains relatively unchanged, at least partly because so

1950s to present

much of the non-local traffic has shifted to the Turnpike. (The exact impact of the Turnpike on Route 30's traffic load is nearly impossible to document because

relevant records could not be located by officials at the Pennsylvania Department of Highways.)

After Captain Paulson moved on to other things, his son and daughter ran the ship from the 1940s to the late 1970s. Then Jack and Mary Loya took over. Trying to revive business, they renamed the mountain point Mount Ararat and the ship Noah's Ark. They began covering the ship with wooden planking and started a small zoo next to the gas station but soon found that running the place was too much work for two people.

In 1987 they sold the ship to Ron Overly and his fiancée, Christine Ford, who are trying to restore the ship to its former glory. The going is tough because the ship has not been kept after for many years and the changes that were made to convert it into an ark are proving difficult to reverse. Another problem stems from the liquor license, which the former owners let lapse: to get it renewed, all rooms must have lavatories, something the ship didn't have because of the era in which it was built and because a real ship would not have had them. They're both optimistic, however, that the bar and upstairs rooms will be open this summer. They expect their big season, though, to be fall, when travellers are out looking at the foliage. Business was good for them last summer, and Overly says that many former visitors stopped by with reminiscences and suggestions. Although brisk business slows improvements, they are thinking about returning the ship's black exterior siding to its original bright white. Overly plans on restoring the ship as much as possible but also believes a more-elegant-than-original atmosphere will attract modern travellers better. For now the restaurant serves sandwiches and drinks and the gift shop is still there, though many of its contents have moved from souvenir to antique status while sitting there for the past 30 years.

One Bedford woman optimistic about the ship's future is Clara Gardner, Captain Paulson's grandchild. Gardner is a very friendly woman who gets excited talking about her home of many years, the ship hotel. She was born there in 1931 and grew up during the ship's most popular years. Although she

spent her winters at nearby St. Xavier boarding school, she spent her summers and holidays surrounded by hotel visitors. As a little girl, she committed to memory the ship's height above sea level: 2,464 feet. She would stand at the outside wall and sell weeds and postcards to arriving tourists, much to her grandfather's annoyance. She enjoyed meeting the wide variety of people who stopped, like Tom Mix, whom Gardner remembers drove up in a convertible with his name on the side of his car. She also remembers the "shady looking types" who she assumed were bootleggers and such. One nice group of flappers taught her the hoochie-coochie dance, which she performed in a talent show back at school. The school authorities were quick to call her parents, demanding an explanation of her "outrageous behavior."

As the young woman got older, she held various jobs in the ship such as waitressing and selling war stamps, and pumping gas across the street. She remembers very vividly working the gift shop, and especially certain required trips to the basement: "There were always snakes in the basement and we were scared to go down there and bring up the souvenir boxes. The worst things were the moccasins; the snakes would hide in them and slither out sometimes when we opened a box." She feels she led an ordinary life, even in the unusual setting, playing with children into her teens in nearby Schellsburg and at the lumber camp at the top of the hill. Her Grandpa was "a nice man and a very hard worker," she recalls. "He kept a large farm down below the ship with pigs and chickens and crops, although the deer often ate all the vegetables. He also found time on his trips to Holland in the mid-1930s to build three houses."

After getting married and leaving while still a teenager, Gardner returned to work at the ship for the next 25 years. In the 1950s the tourists continued to come, and Gardner blames the ship's gradual slide into disrepair — not the Turnpike — for its decline as a roadside attraction. "Groups would rent out the ship's rooms year-round," she says, "and buses, sometimes seven or eight at a time, would stop. We were always busy."

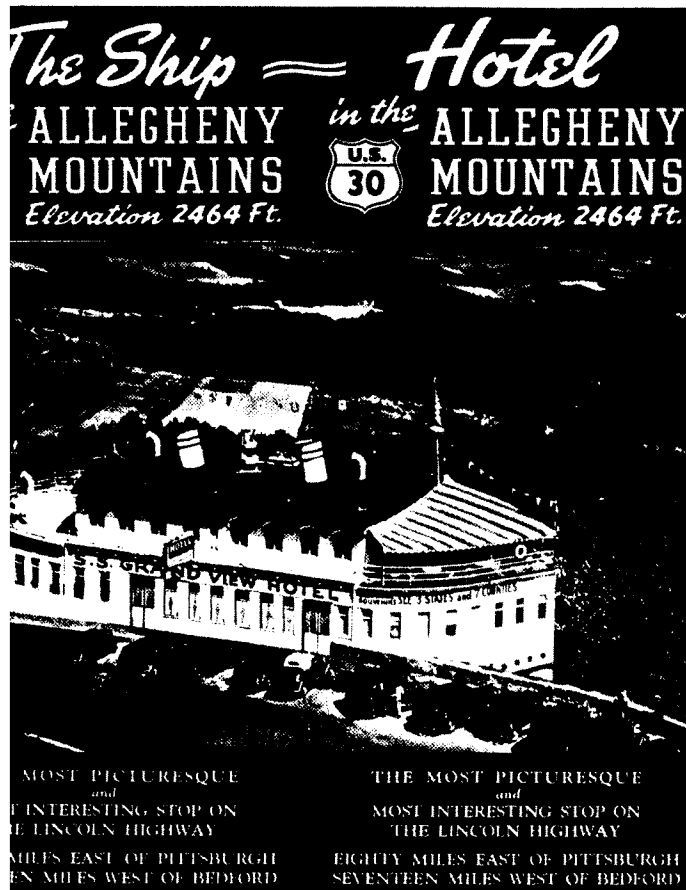
Her husband, however, was not so interested in the ship, and when it came time for her uncle

to sell, they let it go out of the family. She still keeps in touch with many of the workers and carries on a tradition her German grandmother offered at the ship: chicken and mashed potatoes with gravy on a waffle — the famous chicken waffle dinner.

Walter Paulson, 83, was a young man when his father bought the hot dog stand at Grand View Point. "My father paid \$3,200 for 13 acres on that hillside. When the state widened the curve, they covered the Lincoln Highway all the way to Bedford with the crushed stone they quarried" from the hill. His father borrowed "\$125,000 from two men at 16 percent interest" to build the ship, with a steel base that proved so difficult to engineer that the "contractors eventually went broke trying." He adds that the "ship's ends were supposed to be bigger, but there was no money for a fantail and long bow."

In addition to the famous personalities who visited the ship, Paulson remembers ambassadors from China and Japan, as well as Soviet engineers who were touring steel mills in the Pittsburgh area. ("We weren't allowed to call them Russians, only Soviets," he notes.) In all he recalls





36 countries being represented in the guest book.

He and Gardner both hope the new owners succeed.

Meanwhile, the Lincoln Highway continues to fade into obscurity. Its success as a major highway spawned a generation of super-highways that contributed to its eventual obsolescence. It makes the news occasionally, but usually for its head-on crashes, and only as Route 30. But away from the cities and suburbs, where it curves awkwardly around mountains, meanders next to gentle streams, and passes the mailboxes of farmhouses, the Lincoln Highway still exists. The tourist camps are gone, and so are most of the old gas stations and diners. But the road and its environment sit mostly untouched in these areas, a looking glass back to an earlier time. Nearer to cities the highway is virtually lost to new roadway projects, bypasses, and general modernization. In some areas it has been bypassed three times. Only in smaller towns, where the original route can be retraced, are references to the Lincoln Highway found: the occasional Lincoln Garage, Lincoln Court Motel, or perhaps a street named Lincoln Way.

The highway was marked one last time, in 1928, when 3,000 cement posts were used to memorialize its dedication to Lincoln. Very few remain today — perhaps 10 in Pennsylvania. They serve no purpose to modern travellers but are quaint reminders of the past, just as the tollhouses on turn-of-the-century turnpikes intrigued motorists when the Lincoln Highway was young.

Just down the mountain from the ship, a couple of hundred feet or so, stands Lada's Candy Store in a tall stone building known as the Shot Factory. This old stagecoach inn dates from the same era as the white bricks across the road, remnants of a tollgate on the Bedford-Stoystown turnpike. Among these sights, the ship hotel sits especially forlornly, waiting for carloads of visitors to again climb to its top deck for a better view of 3 states and 7 counties. ■

The S.S. Grand View Point Hotel can be reached from Pittsburgh by taking the Turnpike east to the Somerset Exit. Take Route 219 north for 13 miles, then Route 30 east 16 miles. For a more scenic trip, take Route 30 east for 80 miles from Pittsburgh through Irwin, Greensburg and Ligonier. The ship is open daily, 9 to 9; Phone: (814) 733-4292.

Tourist information on the area is available from the Bedford County Travel Promotion Agency: (814) 623-1771.

Also of interest is a reprint of the 1916 *Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*, available for \$10 plus \$1.50 postage from the highway's unofficial historian Lyn Protteau, Pleiades Press, P.O. Box 255185, Sacramento, CA 95865.

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