



Camp Tia Juana – 286 West Sixth Street, Richland Center.

In the 1920s and 1930s between the days of auto camping on unauthorized sites or municipal parks, and the development of modern motels in the 1950s, tourist cabins provided simple overnight accommodations for motor travelers. From the tiny cabins with bunks without indoor plumbing, to the luxury cabins with steam heat and upholstered furniture, travelers were charged from \$1 per night up to \$2.50 or more. Some cabins included bedding, dishes, and tableware for an additional charge. Finding clean cabins was the main goal for tourists in this era.

To meet travelers' needs, oil companies began to publish lists of approved cabins and collected information on their condition. As an example, the Conoco Travel Bureau published free brochures for various sections of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. These brochures were available to Conoco customers at gas stations. Cottage camp locations were included in Brochure #5 for the North Central Section of the United States that included Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Michigan. There were an amazing number of locations available; Richland County had at least five and likely more that have been forgotten.

One begins to wonder what became of all of these cabins. Were they incorporated into a motel? Were they moved and utilized as garages and storage buildings? Were they bulldozed, burned, forgotten? Tourist camps and courts were a common form of lodging for travelers in the United States from the 1930s to the 1960s. The terms "tourist camp" and "tourist court" were used to describe either an individual cabin or room rented for the night and the business as a whole. In their early days, they typically consisted of stand-alone structures that looked and functioned like small houses, with as few as four units to rent and space to park your automobile. Those built during and after World War II were increasingly likely to be under a single roof in the form recognizable today as motels.

Unlike earlier hotels that served mostly railroad passengers, tourist camps and courts evolved along roadways to accommodate the needs of the newly motoring public. In the 1920s, the average white, middle-class family likely owned



Demmer Tourist Court Cafe & Texaco Service U.S. Hwy 14 & Wis. Hwy 60, Gotham.

a car, and recreational travel by automobile became increasingly common as Americans sought a nature break from crowded cities. The common practice of roadside camping spawned free municipal campgrounds across the country, often in city parks. Most city-sponsored

campgrounds did not last into the 1930s, due mostly to overcrowding, increasing costs, and the potential profits to be made from the growing numbers of Americans on the road. The building in Richland Center's Krouskop Park known as "the warming house," was actually the kitchen building for such an auto camp.



Park View Tourist Court - U.S. Hwy 14 West, Richland Center.

Beginning in the mid-1920s, thousands of small, private, locally owned tourist camps were being built across the country; the more modern of these began calling themselves "tourist courts." They furnished an increasing array of amenities, such as heat in the winter, electric fans in the summer, private bathrooms and kitchens (as opposed to the communal ones of the earlier camps),

linens, radios, and garages. By the 1940s and 1950s, many tourist courts offered room telephones, cafes, gas, and even swimming pools and air-conditioning. "Motel" (a blend of motor and hotel) became a popular term beginning in the 1940s and implied more rooms and greater conveniences to travelers. The terms co-existed into the 1950s and early 1960s, after which "tourist court" was largely dropped by business owners and the general public.

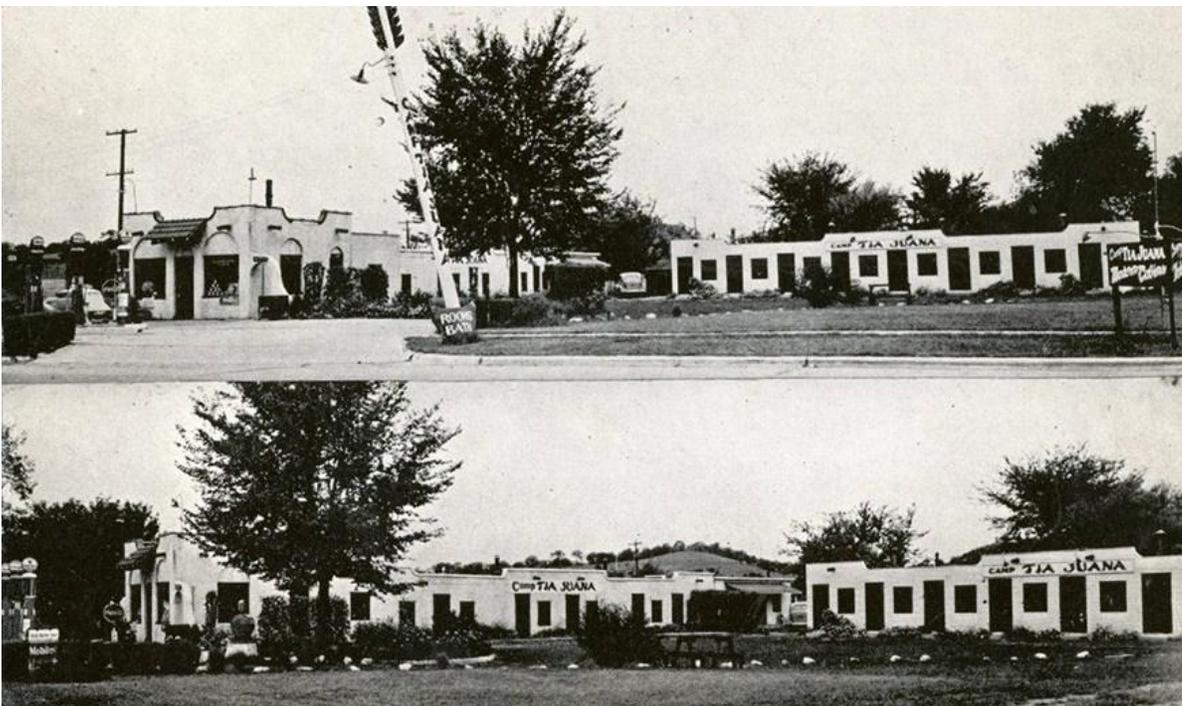


Riverside Cabin Camp - HWY 14 & Cty Hwy TB Twin Bluffs.

Naturally, the greatest numbers of tourist courts and motels were near popular tourist destinations, such as much of the state of Wisconsin, and in larger cities.

Owners of camps and courts often appealed to tourists by referencing local attractions in the names of their businesses. The construction of the interstate highway system in the late 1950s and early 1960s signaled the decline of “mom and pop” tourist courts and motels. Roadside lodging became an increasingly franchised business of larger hotels along the new roads. The number of locally owned tourist courts and motels peaked in the United States in the early 1960s.

Today, most of the hundreds of tourist courts have been demolished or repurposed beyond recognition. Some that survive still function as motels. Others serve as rental housing, storage, retail space, or are abandoned. Camp Tia Juana located on West Sixth Street has survived; somewhat recognizable, but with its service station building repurposed as a walk-up fast food location serving visitors of Krouskop Park. There is a motel at the location of the Park View Tourist Court and an abandoned motel is intact on the Twin Bluffs property. The Demmer Tourist Court building still exists, but has been remodeled beyond recognition.



Above: This building, slated for demolition, was the kitchen building for a long-gone auto camp located on the north side of Richland Center. It's in a flood plain and therefore extremely difficult and expensive to move. Left: Another view of Camp Tia Juana in its heyday.