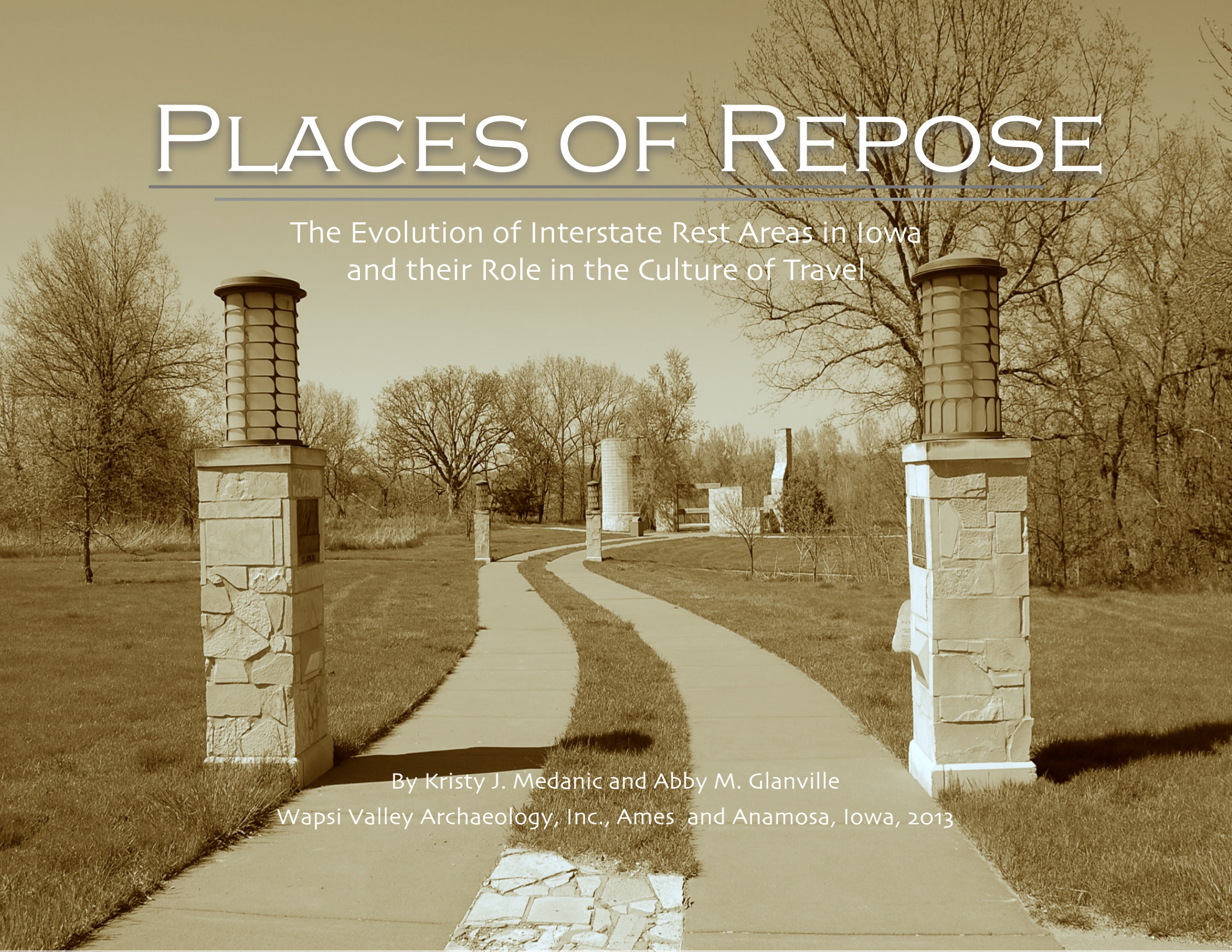


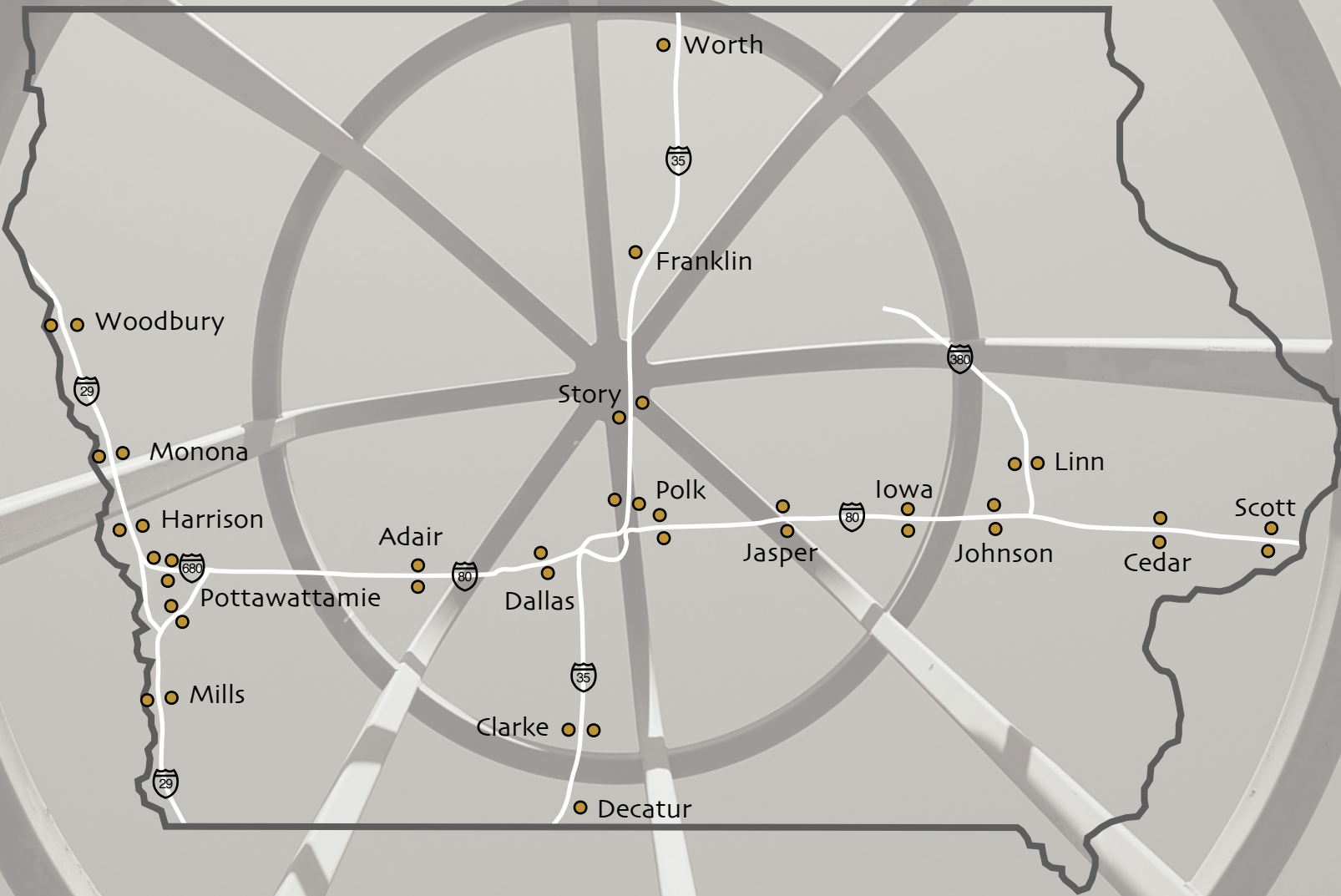
# PLACES OF REPOSE

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The Evolution of Interstate Rest Areas in Iowa  
and their Role in the Culture of Travel

By Kristy J. Medanic and Abby M. Glanville  
Wapsi Valley Archaeology, Inc., Ames and Anamosa, Iowa, 2013





# IOWA INTERSTATE REST AREAS AND WELCOME CENTERS BY COUNTY

Background photograph: Silo sculpture near a designed overlook at the northbound rest area in Decatur County on Interstate 35.

# PLACES OF REPOSE

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## The Evolution of Interstate Rest Areas in Iowa and their Role in the Culture of Travel

By Kristy J. Medanic, Historian  
and Abby M. Glanville, Project Architectural Historian  
Wapsi Valley Archaeology, Inc., Ames and Anamosa, Iowa

Published by the Iowa Department of Transportation, 2013

*In June 2011, the Iowa Department of Transportation requested documentation of Iowa's oldest interstate rest areas in an effort to record their history as they reached their 50th year and imminent demolition. In the last decade, the Iowa Department of Transportation began the process of replacing Iowa's oldest rest areas with new, modern, technologically equipped rest areas to meet the changing needs of commercial and recreational motorists. According to guidelines set forth by the National Park Service, any structure 50 years or older is potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. As such, with each passing year, Iowa's rest areas grow closer to achieving this status. While there are no plans for listing the rest areas alone or as a group on the National Register of Historic Places, the Iowa Department of Transportation authorized the creation of this booklet to inform the historical record of their significance.*

*This booklet was produced by Wapsi Valley Archaeology, Inc. for the Iowa Department of Transportation. The architectural survey and research conducted for its production were completed by Kristy Medanic and Abby Glanville. Except where noted otherwise, all photographs were taken by Kristy Medanic and all drawings, design, and layout were done by Abby Glanville. The booklet was edited by Nurit Finn and K. Lindsay Eaves.*

*Wapsi Valley Archaeology, Inc. would like to thank Brennan Dolan, Matt Donovan, Libby Wielenga, and Hank Zalatel of the Iowa Department of Transportation for their assistance in obtaining archival materials for this project. We would also like to thank Rinda Kramme of the State Library of Iowa, as well as the staff of the State Historical Society Library of Des Moines for their assistance with locating reference materials for this project.*

## The Complete Highway

Debates in the first two decades of the twentieth century raged about the future of highway development across the country. As consumers purchased more automobiles and began traveling greater distances, the need for a safe and accessible public roadway system emerged. Iowa roads at that time were notorious for their poor conditions. Coupled with the constant worry about the mechanical stability of early automobiles, traveling was difficult. Weary travelers battled with mud-covered roads on their way to visit family, buy essentials at the local store, and even on a daily basis just to travel to work. In the late 1920s through the 1940s, however, things began to improve for drivers across the state. Innovations in road-building equipment allowed construction teams to "move dirt" at 35 miles per hour at a cost of 35 to 50 cents per cubic foot to make way for the first paved roads.<sup>1</sup> The resulting smooth-riding highways not only made it possible for Iowa drivers to get where they were going in less time, they ushered in a new era of tourism-based travel. Touring the American countryside became an inexpensive, enjoyable way for families to spend time together. However, since automobiles were still far from perfect and not all counties completed paving, travel could still be treacherous.

In response to the increased number of drivers on the road, the National Highway Research Board (part of the National Research Board) began studying the effects of these new drivers on the highway system in 1937. They examined every aspect of highway travel in order to produce the first comprehensive study on roadside development. For the first time, engineers focused not simply on roadbed construction, but also on the construction of the "Complete Highway": one that not only met the traveler's transportation needs, but also catered to their physical well-being. The committee, comprised of members of the American Association of State Highway Officials and the Highway Research Board, concluded that:

roadside development must conserve, enhance and effectively display the natural beauty of the landscape through which the highway passes as well as provide maximum safety, utility, economy, and recreational facilities by means of proper location, design, construction and maintenance of the highway.<sup>2</sup>

While policy-makers continued to argue about how to commence the creation of the "Complete Highway," the current roads began to grow even more crowded. In their 1948 report, the Highway Research Board explained the problems caused by broken-down cars on busy highways, noting, "When motor vehicles began to crowd other forms of traffic off our main highways, the present problems of the turnout and wayside rest areas did not exist. Motor vehicles were simply parked wherever the motorist could get off the traveled way." Explaining a situation in California, one member of the Board described the scene. "Tow cars were seen taking away vehicles disabled by driving off the road among the stumps and small boulders," he said. The Board concluded, "States must address this problem by offering motorists safer places to exit the highway than the already overburdened shoulders."<sup>3</sup>

## Early Innovators: Connecticut and Michigan

Ten years before the Highway Research Board made these recommendations, however, two states pioneered the "Complete Highways" idea. As early as the 1930s, Connecticut and Michigan experimented separately with ways to improve the driving experience across their states. The director of the Connecticut State Highway Department, Luther M. Keith, praised his state's innovation in a report entitled *Seven Years Along Connecticut Highways*. "It would have been impossible to start a program of this kind when the states first began to build hard surfaced roads," he explained, "but as miles of pavement increased, the public grew more interested in the out-of-doors until everyone became more or less of a nature lover."<sup>4</sup> He said,

People riding for pleasure and recreation increased our traffic. Outdoor recreational places were demanded and provided. As conditions changed, the ugly roadsides became more noticeable and so there began to be a demand for the better clean up of roadsides following construction work; the maintenance of older shade trees; the planning of new ones; the seeding and planting of raw cuts; and the control of public utility lines and of advertising.<sup>5</sup>



Wayside turnout between Nevada and Colo on the Lincoln Highway/U.S. Highway 30 in Iowa. Source: Iowa Department of Transportation Historic Archives Digital Collection, Iowa Highway Commission Photograph Collection. Image ID: 7390049.

Conditions in Michigan were much the same. J.M. Bennett, superintendent of the Parks and Forestry Board of the Wayne County, Michigan, Road Commissioners, published a similar report on roadside development in Michigan in 1929. Bennett revealed the introduction of several "comfort stations" throughout the state. Saying, "Several buildings of this type [comfort stations] have been constructed by the Board of County Road Commissioners of Wayne County, Michigan." Describing their utility, Bennett noted,

they are in use almost constantly during the entire year. The public in general has demonstrated its appreciation of this service through proper use and favorable comments and the demand for more comfort stations is continuous as traffic increases.<sup>6</sup>

The important difference between Connecticut and Michigan and the rest of the country was that their respective state governments considered roadside improvements like comfort stations integral elements of highway construction, and not optional luxuries.

## The 1947 Highway Research Board Study

In the late 1940s, the Public Roads Administration charged the Highway Research Board with conducting a study on the state of the nation's highway system for presentation at the 1947 national meeting. The Highway Research Board examined all aspects of roadside development including right-of-way; roadside border control; construction and maintenance; education; design specification and public outreach. Determined to present the nation's highways as pathways to the future, the Board made suggestions about ways to improve the highway system to meet the needs of the growing number of travelers. The Board noted property-owners' rights as one of the foremost reasons for change. Explaining the situation they described,

The owner of a farm or residential property along a heavily traveled highway only too often is being provided with accelerated education in the various forms of trespass by the constantly increasing number of motor vehicles and their drivers.<sup>7</sup>

Among the recommendations presented at the 1947 National Meeting of the Public Roads Administration were implementation procedures for highway landscaping, highway zoning, and highway design including the construction of parking turnouts and wayside comfort stations. Because most states lacked the funding needed to follow Connecticut or Michigan's leads, the earliest feasible response in many cases was the introduction of turnouts, rather than rest areas as we know them today.

In most cases, wayside turnouts accomplished similar goals as the much-needed highway resting locations, but at a lower expense. As states turned to formally adopting these state-controlled wayside stops, travelers more frequently made use of services offered at turnout locales rather than trespassing on local farmsteads. In addition, states leveraged these wayside locations to promote natural resource conservation, as well as the preservation of historic sites and scenic lookout points.



Automobile and unidentified family sitting at a picnic table at a wayside turnout between Nevada and Colo on the Lincoln Highway/U.S. Highway 30 in Iowa. Source: Iowa Department of Transportation Historic Archives Digital Collection, Iowa Highway Commission Photograph Collection. Image ID: 7390047.

Background photograph: Wayside turnout on U.S. Highway 65 south of Iowa Falls, Iowa. Source: Iowa Department of Transportation Historic Archives Digital Collection, Iowa Highway Commission Photograph Collection. Image ID: 7598762.



## Wayside Turnouts in Iowa

The earliest wayside turnouts along Iowa's highways were rugged and offered little more than a space to park and a picnic table for a quick lunch. Driveways and turnarounds were paved with gravel or packed dirt, and wood posts provided parking barriers that both directed motorists where to park and prevented them from driving in undesigned areas. These turnout sites were selected primarily for their geographic location and natural features. Sites needed to be far enough away from towns that they would be regularly used, but also in locations that would allow for safe entrance to and exit from the highway. Pleasant views and the presence of ample shade trees were also a consideration. After all, these sites were meant to provide motorists with a break from the stresses of prolonged travel so they would feel refreshed when it was time to embark on the next leg of their journey.<sup>8</sup>



## Adoption of a Standardized Rest Area Design Plan

In the broadest sense, Iowa's early rest area program was an extension of the early twentieth-century conservation activities intended to promote environmental renewal and an increased appreciation for our natural environment. Early engineers, attempting to make rest areas practical yet attractive, struggled with whether to make them strictly wayside stops or to include historic markers, scenic overlooks, and natural land renewal in their design plans. What ultimately occurred was a blending of all three approaches.

Early rest area promoters argued that the quality of a state's rest areas said a lot about their residents. The Iowa Department of Transportation took this idea to heart when they began considering designs for the state's first standardized rest area design plan in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The first consideration was always location. To achieve a peaceful environment, rest areas needed to be a substantial distance from the interstate, but not so far that travel time to reach them seemed burdensome.



Location along the interstate was important too, because placing rest areas too close together or too far apart would limit their use. Engineers also needed to consider prime locations for scenic pull offs with potential for enticing travelers to stop there rather than in nearby farmsteads or local communities. Available rest area amenities were also a consideration during the planning process. The general consensus was that these facilities should, at the very least, offer clean restroom buildings, welcome centers, information kiosks, and picnic shelters, as well as safety features such as paved parking lots, potable water, telephones, lighting, dedicated walkways, and trash disposal.<sup>9</sup>

## Benefits of the Standardized Design Plan

Aside from being more cost-effective than individual rest area plans, the Iowa Department of Transportation decided the major benefit of a standardized, statewide design plan was that guidelines for their operation and routine maintenance could also be made uniform while the more extensive rehabilitation needs that come with continual use and age would become predictable over time.<sup>10</sup> Site-specific maintenance needs would still be inevitable, whether chronic (site drainage, for example), or acute (storm damage, vandalism).<sup>11</sup> From a management and cost perspective, the idea of a standardized plan made a lot of sense, but on a broader scale the standardized rest area plan had further-reaching benefits. Rest areas would provide continuity and a measure of state hospitality, providing travelers with a sense of familiarity and "what to expect," even when venturing into previously uncharted territory.

## Funding

The original funding for the construction of rest areas came from the United States Code, Highways Act of 1958. This *Highways Act* was the first of its kind to dedicate federal funding to roadside

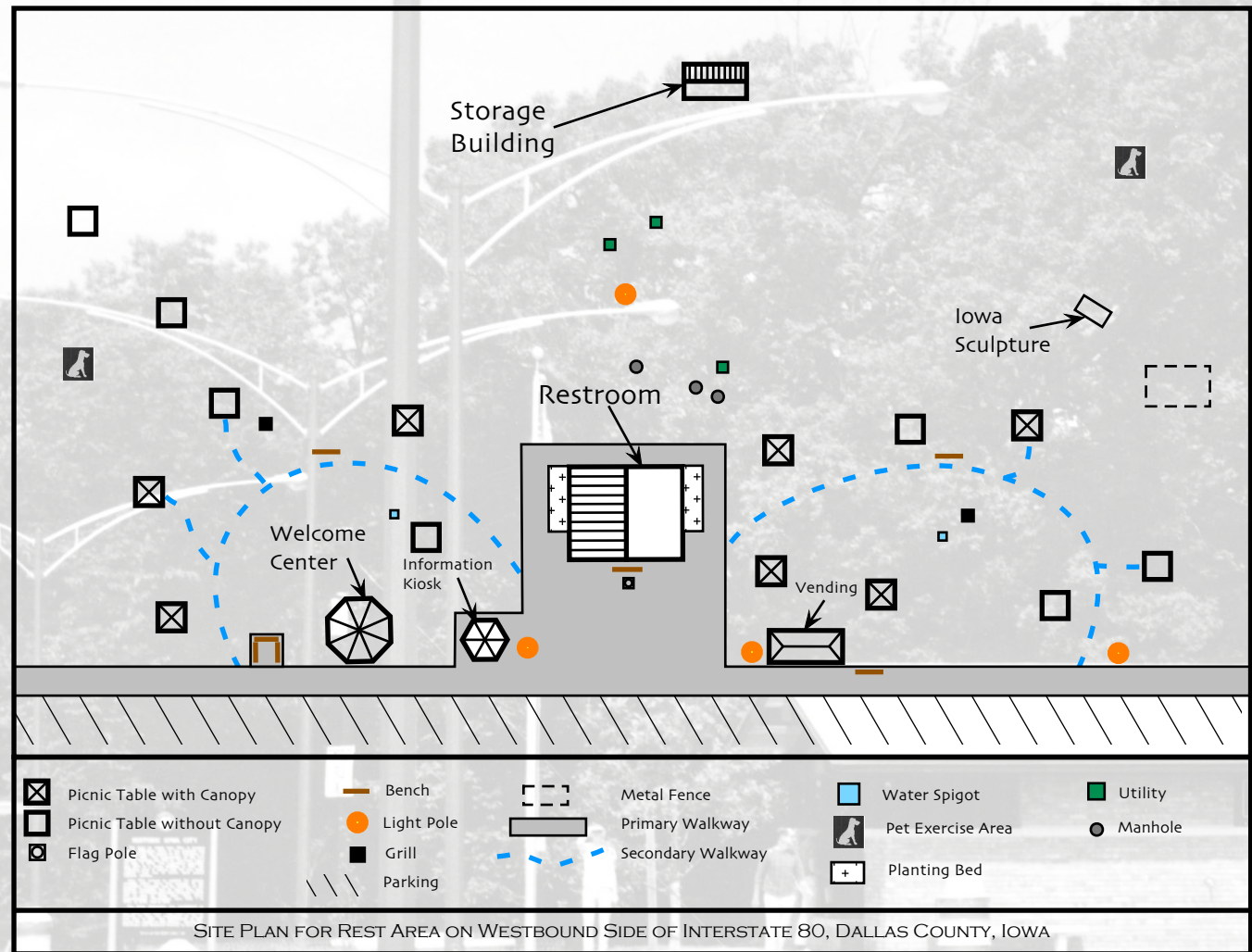


Unidentified man at the eastbound rest area in Iowa County on Interstate 80. Source: Iowa Department of Transportation Historic Archives Digital Collection, Iowa Highway Commission Photograph Collection. Image ID: 7555664.

and landscape development. It awarded up to 3 percent of each state's annual highway budget to purchase land and to erect roadside improvements.<sup>12</sup> Today, under United States Code, Title 23-Highways, all interstate rest areas are eligible for federal funding for construction and rehabilitation.<sup>13</sup> Existing rest areas are eligible for funds from the National Highway System, the Surface Transportation Program, and Interstate Maintenance. Full or partial construction of new rest areas can be paid for with funds from the National Highway System, special federal funding programs such as those for highway beautification and transportation enhancement programs, as well as from state funding alternatives such as state gas taxes.<sup>14</sup>

## Modern Recommendations

A 1966 report from the Highway Research Board gave extensive detailed recommendations about construction and design plans for new rest areas, as well as considerations for managing public health and maintenance. The report focused on creating modern, safe rest areas that would meet the basic needs of travelers. Among their suggestions, the Board recommended constructing the buildings out of wood frame, stone, or brick characteristic of the locality. They recommended electric lights for safety, modern flush toilets for both men and women (including paper towels and soap), and also payphones for communication needs. They also recommended permanent, poured-concrete curbing and landscaping features to reduce potential vandalism, and to protect patrons from the flow of traffic.<sup>15</sup> The Highway Research Board also addressed the need for public health and sanitation needs, as these facilities would be visited by thousands of patrons each year. “Absolute cleanliness should always be maintained,” they argued.



## A Plan Realized

Iowa’s first-generation standardized design plan made all of these recommendations a reality. Early plans included modern facilities, paved parking lots separated by vehicle type, a restroom building, picnic shelters, grills, dedicated pet exercise areas, and, in most cases, a paved walking path. Small welcome centers and visitor information kiosks were also designed, although they were not implemented at all rest areas from this era.

Although each first-generation rest area was designed to account for site-specific conditions such as scenic vistas and terrain, the plan shown at left illustrates the layout predominantly utilized across the state. The restroom building is centrally located on the site between two walking paths that provide access to various picnic tables and benches. Where applicable, welcome centers, information kiosks, and vending machine buildings were constructed close to the parking lot on either side of the restroom building.

Rest areas, well-designed and well-placed, are without question an important adjunct to the “Complete Highway.” They add to safety as well as to beauty on the road. As more and more traveling is done on the rapidly growing Interstate System, such rest and relaxation will take on even more importance. Interstate highway driving is often long-haul driving that can produce fatigue through monotony and eyestrain. The rest areas along these highways can obviously make significant contributions to the safety of the driver and his passengers. In short, rest areas add immeasurably to the ability of our highway system to serve fully the motoring public.<sup>17</sup>

Background photograph: Unidentified rest area on Interstate 80. Source: Iowa Department of Transportation Historic Archives Digital Collection, Iowa Highway Commission Photograph Collection. Image ID: 7555641.



## Restroom Buildings

The first-generation restroom buildings are rectangular, single-story buildings constructed on concrete slabs. They are clad in brick using a running bond, and each has a front-gabled, asphalt shingle roof. The primary façade of each building is divided into three bays by square, wooden roof supports that rest on low, bay-wide, rectangular brick piers with cast-concrete caps. The two outer bays of the façade each have a steel-framed glass door, and the central bay is filled in with steel-framed, fixed windows that extend from the top of the pier into the roof gable.

Although this restroom building design was created nearly forty years after the initial decline in popularity of both the Prairie and Craftsman styles of architecture in Iowa, it is evident that they provided inspiration for the design. Prairie and Craftsman style influences include an overall horizontal emphasis through the use of a low-pitched roof and horizontal rows of rectangular windows that wrap the front corners of the building, a wide roof overhang, exposed roof beams on the primary façade, and a contrasting cast concrete cap found on windowsills and the top of the low brick pier on the primary façade. In addition, the prominent use of wood for architectural details and a brown-hued color scheme may also be a nod to the rustic style of architecture that was most prominently used for recreational architecture throughout the 1930s. This style and scheme are also found in state and national parks across the country.

The two primary entrances of the first-generation restroom building lead into a lobby furnished with tiled or scored-concrete flooring, benches, and waste receptacles. A large wall case hangs opposite the entrances and displays a transportation map of Iowa. In the past ten years, a digital ticker displaying relevant travel conditions was installed in most rest areas above the wall case. Steel doors located at either end of this wall lead to the men's (left side) and women's (right side) restrooms.





Northbound rest area in Woodbury County on Interstate 29 with enclosed lobby.



Early vending machine building at the northbound rest area in Woodbury County on Interstate 29.



Modern vending machine building at the eastbound rest area in Scott County on Interstate 80.

Notably, all lobbies on these restroom buildings were originally “open-air,” meaning they had no doors or glazing. This pattern is still found at both the eastbound and westbound rest areas on Interstate 680 in Pottawattamie County in western Iowa, as in the photograph at center. All other restroom buildings across the state have been enclosed as described above. The lobbies were enclosed on a periodic basis over a span of several years, accounting for the variety of window and door types installed at each location.

## Vending Machine Buildings

Two types of vending machine buildings were found during the architectural survey. It is believed that the smaller of the two, shown in the middle left photograph, is the earlier version, given this type was only found at two rest areas in the state. The larger, glass and steel version with a hipped roof, shown in the bottom left photograph, is installed at all other first-generation rest areas across the state.

Background photograph: Unidentified “open-air” rest area on Interstate 80 prior to the lobby being enclosed with windows. Source: Iowa Department of Transportation Historic Archives Digital Collection, Iowa Highway Commission Photograph Collection. Image ID: 7555640.

## Welcome Centers and Information Kiosks

Separate welcome centers and information kiosks were designed in association with the restroom buildings using brick and wood as primary materials, and utilizing a low-pitched roof. The difference between these two building types is that welcome centers were intended to be staffed so that motorists could talk to someone knowledgeable about local and regional travel and points of interest, whereas visitor information kiosks were intended for self-service pick-up of maps and brochures. Welcome centers were designed with octagonal floor plans to maximize wall-surface display area, as can be seen in the photograph of the cut-away building model below. Two of the eight walls were fitted with floor-to-ceiling, fixed-pane windows, and one wall contained the steel-framed glass entrance. The much smaller, visitor information kiosks were designed with hexagonal, "open-air" floor plans for display of additional maps and pertinent regional information. It should be noted that welcome centers and information kiosks were not constructed at all first-generation rest areas. Of the twenty-six sites visited during the architectural survey, only two welcome centers and eight information kiosks were found.



Floorplan model of a rest area welcome center. Source: Iowa Department of Transportation Historic Archives Digital Collection, Iowa Highway Commission Photograph Collection. Image ID: 13612710.



Visitor information kiosk at the westbound rest area in Dallas County on Interstate 80.

Background photograph: Grounds and picnic shelters at the southbound rest area in Clarke County on Interstate 35.



## Rest Area Grounds

Grounds at first-generation rest areas have very little formal landscaping, mostly limited to permanent, poured-concrete planters located on either side of the restroom building and occasionally in front of the building. Small, moveable concrete planters containing seasonal flowers were also located at various rest areas. Nearly all of these rest areas feature a meandering, paved walkway that leads motorists throughout the rest area proper, providing access to various benches and picnic tables situated beneath large shade trees. Many of the picnic tables are covered by canopies, which follow the same design scheme as the associated buildings. They have very low-pitched, five-paneled, asphalt shingle roofs supported by three pairs of wood posts anchored to a poured-concrete pad.

While some of these rest areas feature designed overlooks or reference nearby points of interest with interpretive signs, this idea was explored and implemented on a much grander scale in the second generation of designed rest areas discussed in the next section of this book.

Concrete restroom building and lookout tower at the westbound rest area in Pottawattamie County on Interstate 680.

One exception, however, is a second rest area located on the westbound side of Interstate 680. Not only is this rest area unique for its poured-concrete restroom building design, the site was specifically chosen for its unobstructed view of the Missouri River Valley, and a multi-story, wooden tower was constructed there to enhance the viewing experience of motorists.



## The "Big Red Barn"

Over the last fifty years, Iowa's first generation of standardized rest areas has successfully operated in all regions of the state. With that success has come costly deterioration leading to their inability to meet the needs of an ever-increasing volume of motorists. To remedy this situation, in the 1990s, the Iowa Department of Transportation began to consider replacement of these aging facilities and ways to improve the overall rest area experience. In terms of tourism, rest areas are often the first and last places motorists stop within a state, and in some cases the only stops made. This realization prompted development of the idea that state-managed rest areas not only have a responsibility to provide basic services, but that they are also in an ideal position to provide motorists with an experience that is uniquely Iowa-inspired, and have the potential to encourage a return trip to the state. It marked the beginning of a ten-year campaign that would eventually replace ten interstate rest areas with completely reimagined, attractive facilities geared towards educating the public about local history, culture, and points of interest by incorporating interpretive signs, sculpture, murals, and other architectural details into each rest area's overall design. The result is that today, Iowa's second-generation rest areas are not only equipped with the basic services motorist might expect, they are also ambassadors for our state.

The first of these second-generation rest areas is the welcome center located in Worth County on Interstate 35 in north central Iowa. With a high volume of traffic constantly rushing up and down Interstate 35, Iowa's northern gateway was a natural choice for constructing the state's first rest area designed as a tool for relaying Iowa's story to the traveling public. Funding was a major obstacle, however, the Iowa Department of Transportation was able to partner with organizations from both the private and public sectors to secure the financial backing necessary to see the project through to fruition. The Iowa Department of Economic Development was an obvious candidate for partnership because they were already in the market for land to construct additional welcome centers near gateway areas.<sup>18</sup> In the private sector, I-35/105 Welcome Center, Inc., a non-profit organization comprised of community and business leaders from Worth and Winnebago Counties, also offered support for the project.<sup>19</sup> With funding approved, design plans moved forward and took the shape of a big red barn and silo reminiscent of the thousands of historic farmsteads found across Iowa's rural landscape. Once opened in June of 1998, the southbound rest area and welcome center in Worth County provided a glimpse of the possible trajectory of future Iowa interstate rest area design.

This facility is a rectangular, two-story building constructed on a concrete foundation and clad in concrete block and vertical wood siding. It features a traditional gambrel roof with a faux hay door in the western gable, and enormous, multi-pane windows in all facades. Restrooms, vending machines, and telephones are located on the lower level, and a gift shop with an information kiosk is located in the upper level. The interior is finished with natural woods and exposed beams to provide the ambiance of a historic barn, a theme continued throughout the rest area's grounds. Complementary gable-roofed picnic table canopies, designed with concrete block piers to stabilize the roof supports, shade travelers as they snack.





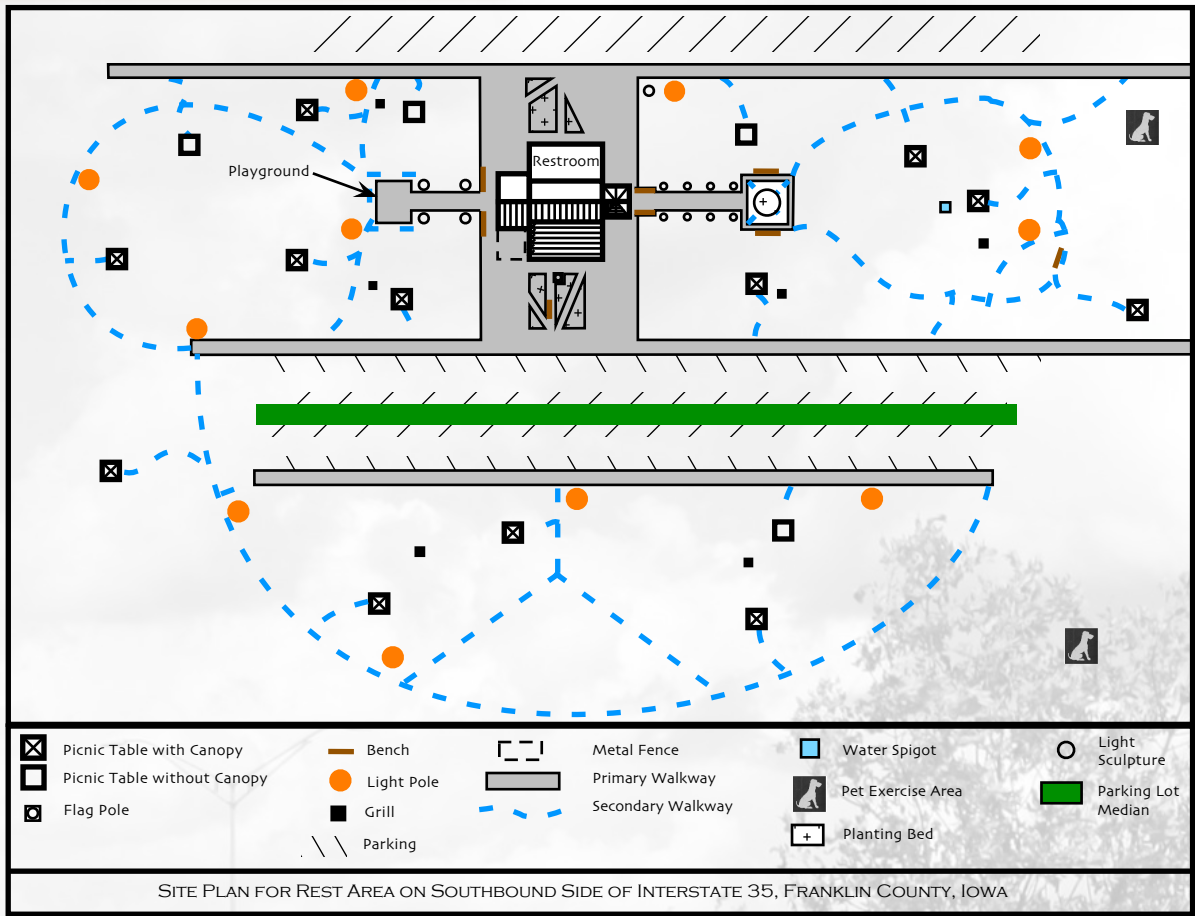
REST AREA  
WELCOME CENTER

REST AREA  
WELCOME CENTER

## The Second Standardized Rest Area Design Plan

While Iowa's "Big Red Barn" rest area and welcome center certainly makes a bold impression on motorists entering the state from the north, it was the only second-generation rest area in the state specifically designed to imitate the form of an Iowa icon. All later second-generation rest areas were constructed according to a standardized design plan with only minimal variation from facility to facility. Second-generation rest areas include all of the same amenities as first-generation rest areas, however, because the new restroom building design incorporated front and back entrances, the buildings were placed at the center of rest area grounds with landscaping utilized on all sides of the building, rather than just the primary façade. The site plan on the opposite page illustrates how this was accomplished at the southbound Franklin County rest area on Interstate 35.

The restroom buildings at these new facilities are roughly T-shaped and constructed on concrete foundations. Exterior cladding materials are generally rough-cut concrete block on the bottom third of the façade with either smooth concrete block or brick in the upper levels. Square metal panels and translucent fiberglass panels are also found in the upper levels of the primary façades. Roofs are a combination of shed and gable types, and are all clad in raised-seam sheet metal.



Paved entry plazas lead motorists to the building entrance, guiding them past beautifully landscaped planting beds, benches, and, in some locations, sculptural lighting. The primary entrances to these buildings are automatic sliding doors beneath shed roofs located on either side of a square entrance vestibule that protrudes from the main body of the building. Once inside the vestibule, another pair of automatic sliding doors leads into a long, narrow lobby with a vaulted ceiling. Lobbies generally contain drinking fountains, benches, waste receptacles, vending machines, telephones, maps, and a computer kiosk with up-to-date travel information. There are two men's restrooms and two women's restrooms located on the left and right sides of the lobby, respectively. A second entrance to the restroom building is located at the far end of the lobby opposite the primary entrance.



Exterior cladding on the restroom building at the southbound rest area in Franklin County on Interstate 35.

Background photograph: Southbound rest area and welcome center in Franklin County on Interstate 35.

While these second-generation restroom buildings do not conform to a specific architectural style, it is evident they were inspired by contemporary municipal buildings where design emphasis is placed on creating an open floorplan, illumination by natural light, and showcasing architectural elements. This atmosphere is accomplished through the use of an unobstructed-artery lobby, a two-story, vaulted ceiling with monitor windows, and exposed ceiling beams and bracing. Interior finishes are also similar to those found in contemporary municipal buildings and consist of durable materials such as ceramic or synthetic tiles for both floor and wall coverings that are designed to handle the high volume of traffic these facilities serve on a daily basis, and natural wood slats in the ceiling to create a warm contrast.



Lobby of the restroom building at the southbound rest area in Franklin County on Interstate 35.





## Welcome Centers

Aside from their larger, modern designs, another major difference between first-generation and second-generation rest areas is that the latter design includes an optional, attached welcome center intended for regular staffing. During the statewide survey of all rest areas, it was found that four of the thirteen second-generation standardized rest areas had attached welcome centers. All four of these welcome centers were in second-generation rest areas located near a state border on the inbound side of the interstate.

Where present, welcome centers at second-generation rest areas are generally accessible from the primary entrance vestibule opposite the lobby entrance. They are rectangular in plan and house a reception desk for welcome center staff and various wall and freestanding displays for maps and brochures.



Welcome center at the westbound rest area in Cedar County on Interstate 80.



Designed bench and planter with lighting at the northbound rest area and welcome center in Decatur County on Interstate 35.



## Rest Area Grounds

The grounds at second-generation rest areas are far more lavish than their first-generation counterparts. It is evident that the Iowa Department of Transportation saw rest area grounds as another opportunity to make an impression on motorists. Not only are all of the second-generation rest area grounds equipped with a large inventory of shade trees, but they also boast large, permanent planting beds filled with various ornamental grasses, shrubs, and flowers. Paved, meandering walking paths again lead to various benches and picnic tables throughout the rest area proper, as well as to natural features, designed lookout points, sculptures, interpretive signs, and, at some facilities, unpaved hiking paths.

## Themes

Although all of the second-generation standardized rest areas contain similarly constructed restroom buildings and features, it is their individual themes that set each one apart from the next. The creation of theme-based rest areas was the result of exploiting their potential as local ambassadors. As such, they are stocked with local information and adorned with site-specific works of art that endorse the sites, history, and culture that are unique to that particular region of the state.

Themes are implemented in a variety of ways throughout these rest areas, but most commonly this is accomplished on the exterior through the use of architectural building details, lighting, sculpture, picnic table canopies, and on the building's interior through wall and floor mosaics. Specific themes and how they are implemented at rest areas and welcome centers in Story, Pottawattamie, and Cedar Counties are described and illustrated in more detail in the following pages.

## Southbound Rest Area on Interstate 35

Located near the center of Iowa, the southbound rest area in Story County on Interstate 35 commemorates the achievements of agencies, inventors, and interest groups from across the state that played a role in the development of Iowa's transportation system over the years. This theme is appropriate for the Story County rest area due to its proximity to Ames, home of the Iowa Department of Transportation's headquarters, as well as portions of the Lincoln Highway (U.S. Highway 30), which is recognized as the nation's first transcontinental highway.

All forms of transportation are honored at this rest area through use of exterior lightboxes placed along walking paths that carry images of steamboats, early automobiles, bicycles, trains, airplanes, horsedrawn carriages, and even pedestrians. On the interior, wall murals illustrate scenes depicting the process of modernizing Iowa's transportation network.

The entry plaza and rest area grounds are dotted with rectangular light boxes depicting cut-out images of various methods of transportation.



Picnic tables with square metal canopies are located along a meandering walking path that runs throughout the rest area grounds providing shaded seating for motorists. Lightboxes illuminate transportation images.



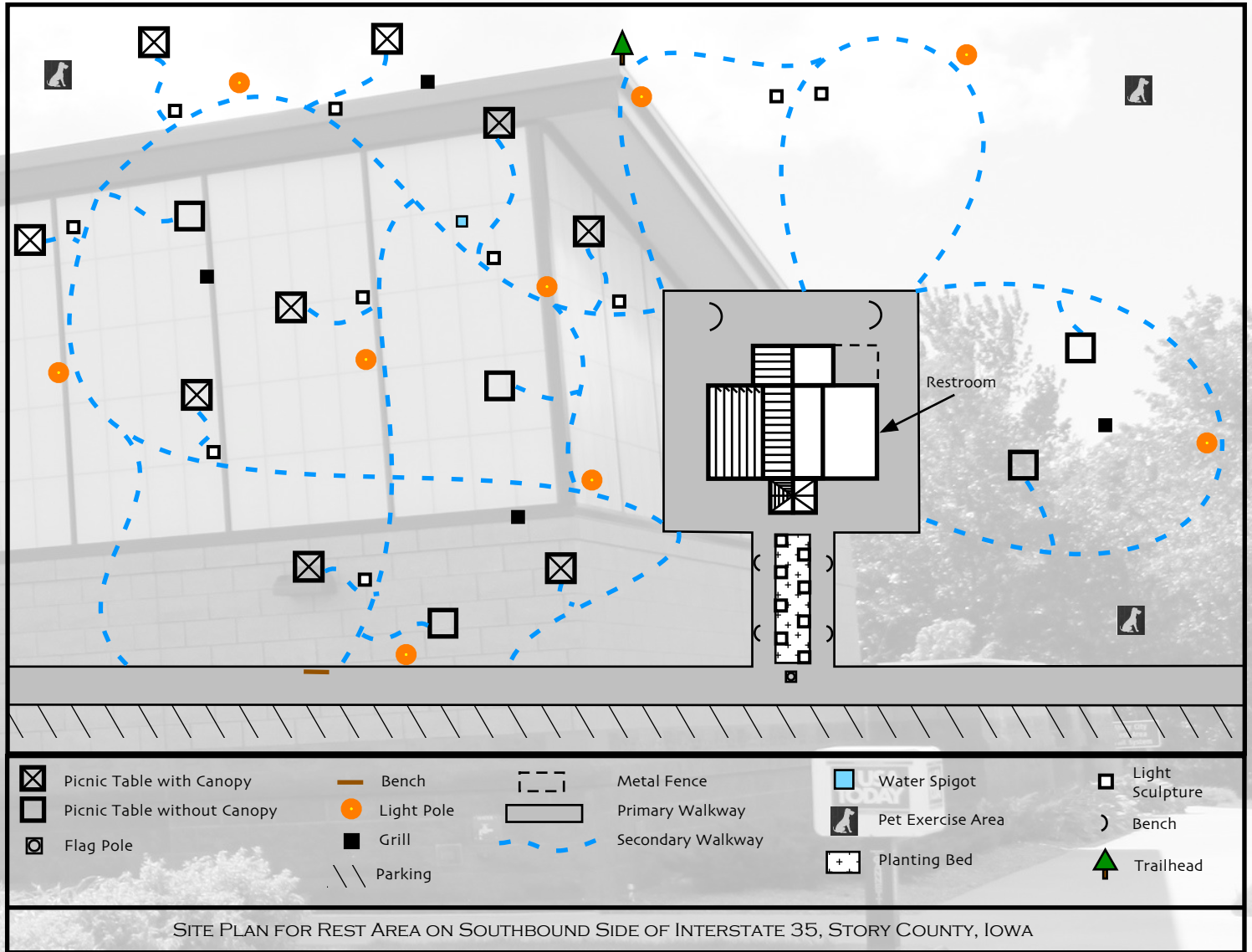
Half-circle metal benches installed in entry plazas near the front and rear exits of the building are reminiscent of wheels.



Terracotta blocks with images of various automobiles manufactured in Iowa were integrated into the exterior cladding of the restroom building.



The restroom building lobby features large, tiled murals depicting scenes of men surveying land to be used for road construction. The epoxy terrazzo flooring illustrates the intersection of Interstate 35 and the Lincoln Highway south of Ames in Story County.



## Eastbound Rest Area and Welcome Center on Interstate 80

Inspired by the Loess Hills of western Iowa, the eastbound rest area and welcome center on Interstate 80 in Pottawattamie County was designed to celebrate the region's unique geology and plant life. The nearby Loess Hills are an extraordinary landform shaped by the deposition of windblown silt from the Missouri River floodplain over many centuries. Although loess deposits are found worldwide, this landform represents the deepest deposit in the western hemisphere, and one that is in fact rivaled only by a deposit in Shaanxi, China.

Loess terrain is constantly altered by wind and water due to its dry and coarse composition, which makes it particularly susceptible to erosion. The dry soil also makes the landscape suitable for a variety of arid plants that cannot survive elsewhere in Iowa.

The Pottawattamie County rest area and welcome center provides motorists with a physical representation of the dynamic quality of the Loess Hills. Organic shapes were implemented for light sculptures, walkways, and benches to imitate windblown silt, and arid plants and grasses were incorporated into every facet of the landscape design. This rest area not only introduces motorists to the geology of the region, but also perpetuates awareness of one of Iowa's most unexpected and delicate natural features.

Picnic table canopies were constructed on concrete pads poured in organic shapes that echo the meandering walking paths and windblown character of benches and light sculptures installed in the entry plaza.



Poured-concrete benches in the entry plaza designed to imitate the windblown silt dunes that eventually formed the Loess Hills.



Meandering walkway and circular planting bed constructed as a sundial on the northeast side of the restroom building. The planting bed is filled with prairie grasses and arid plants found throughout the Loess Hills ecosystem.

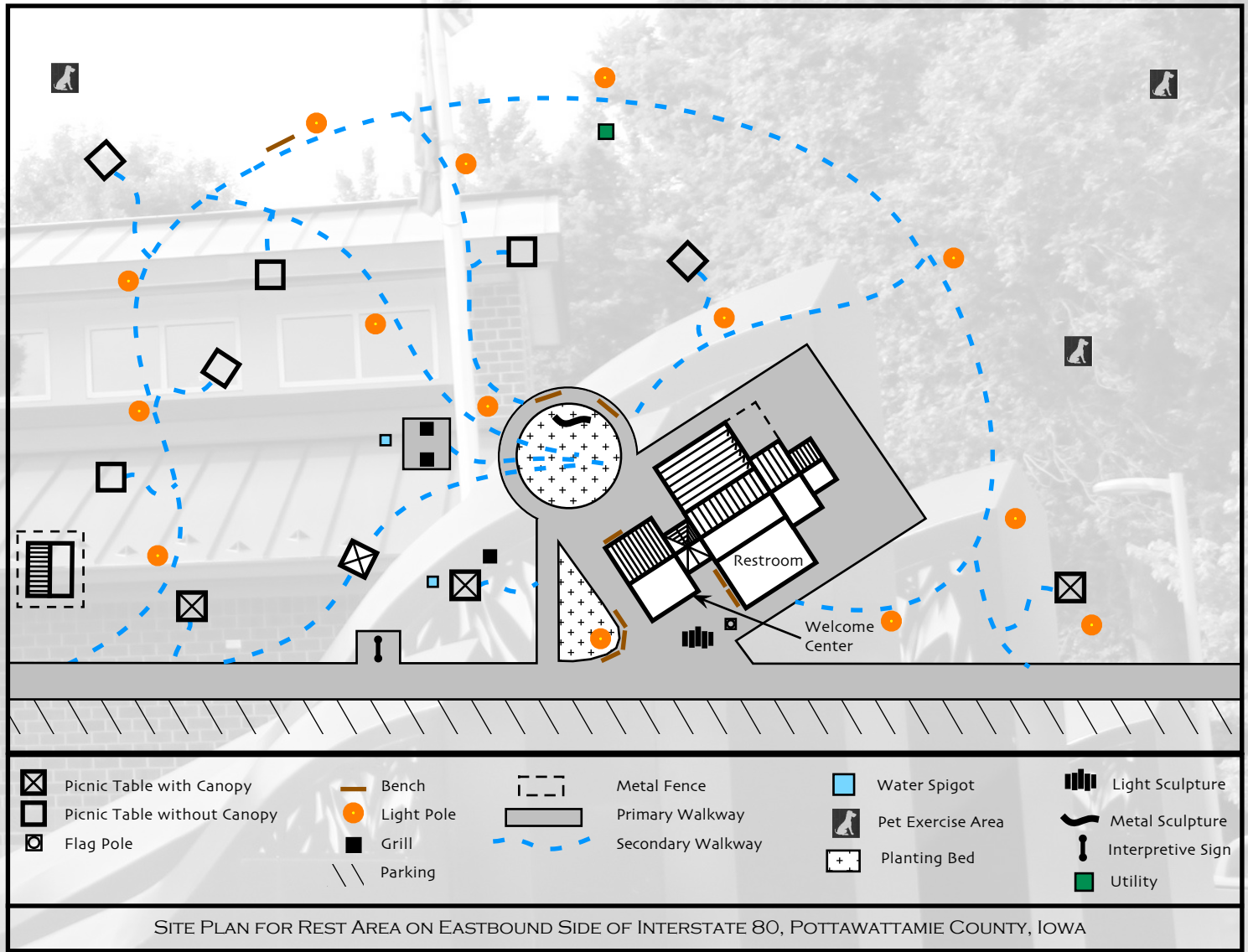


Tiled mural installed in the restroom building lobby depicting significant prehistoric discoveries in the Loess Hills region of Iowa.





Metal sculpture with lighted cutouts designed to look like the prairie grasses that cover the Loess Hills. This sculpture is installed in the entry plaza near the main entrance to the restroom building.



## Eastbound Rest Area on Interstate 80

The eastbound rest area in Cedar County on Interstate 80 was designed as a tribute to the Underground Railroad's important place in Iowa history. The Underground Railroad was a network of safe houses organized to assist slaves fleeing the south in search of freedom in the north. During the Civil War, local citizens established fifteen stops along the route through Cedar County, making the railroad's story an integral part of the region's historical narrative.

Architectural details, seating, and lighting incorporated into the rest area's design create the essence of a lantern-lit train depot that transports motorists back in time, while murals on the floors and walls depict symbolic images of the route to freedom through Cedar County. Patchwork quilts are a dominant design element utilized throughout the restroom building and rest area grounds, as their patterns were believed to have been used to communicate directions and warnings to runaway slaves as they ventured northward.

Lighting throughout the rest area was designed to look like hanging metal lanterns by using lighted metal cutouts installed on square metal posts.



Back-to-back seating historically used at train depots was also implemented with this covered, wooden bench design.



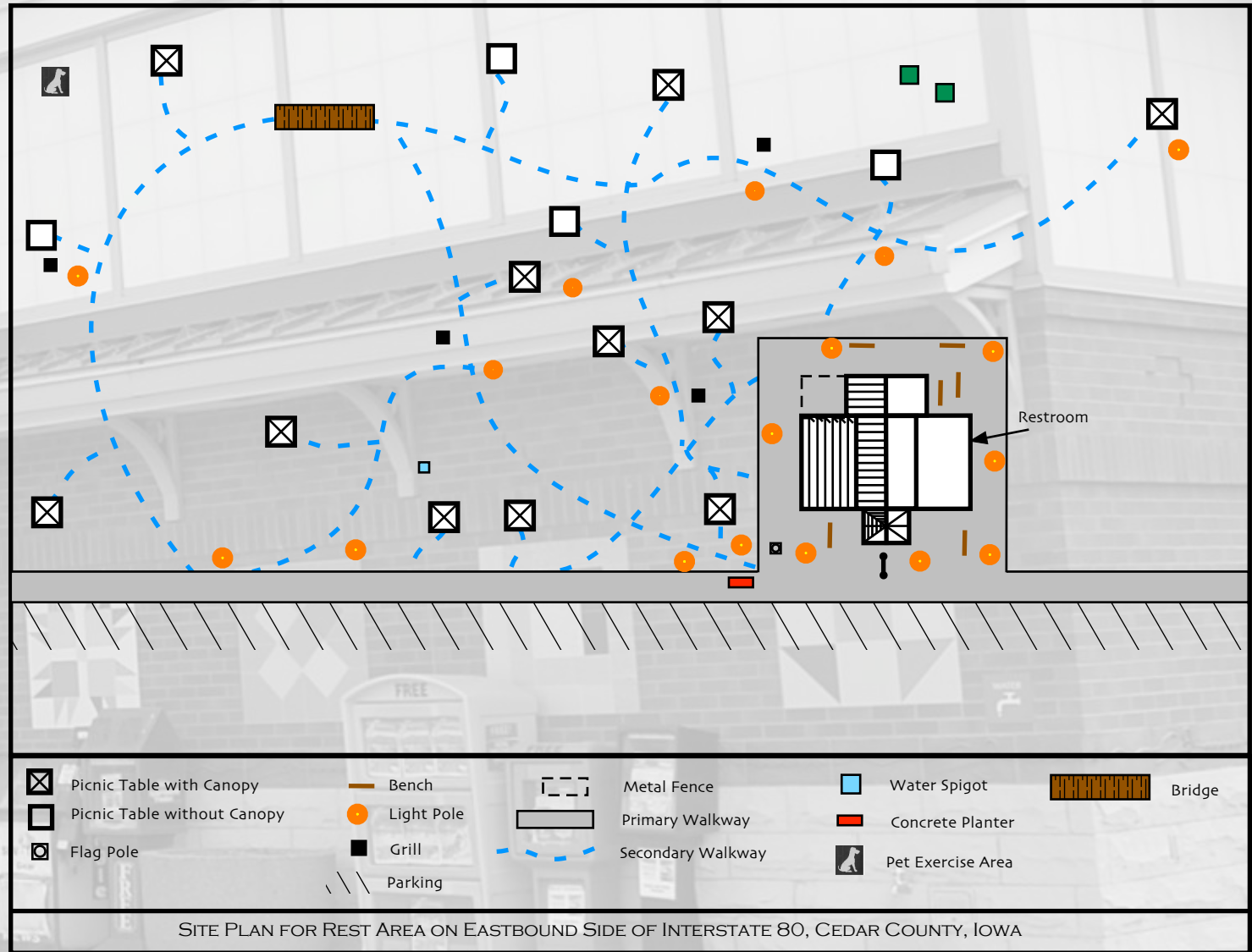
Tiled quilt murals were integrated into the exterior restroom building cladding, as well as the picnic table canopies, and the flooring in the entry vestibule. Decorative brackets were also utilized under the eaves of the restroom building to further create a depot-inspired environment.



Tiled murals in the restroom building lobby were designed with symbolic images relating to the Underground Railroad.



Picnic tables with canopies are located throughout the rest area grounds and are accessible by various paved walkways. Metal grids were installed in the back walls of the picnic table canopies where quilted patterns were hung to communicate directions and warnings to runaway slaves.



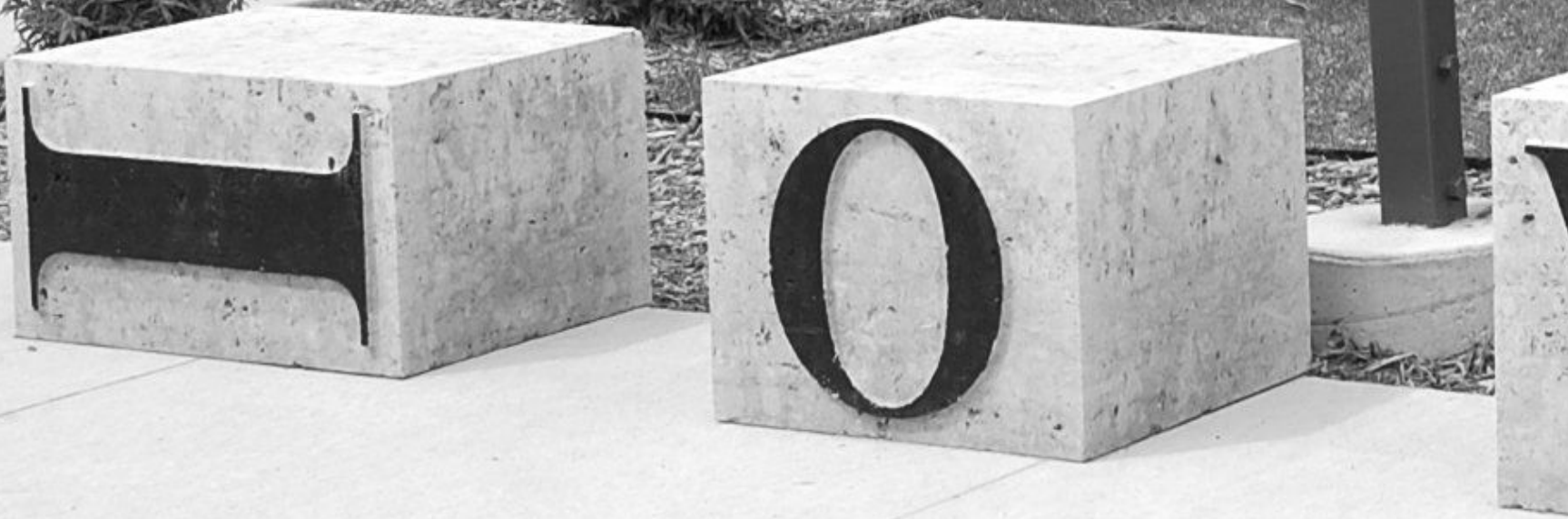
## The Future of Iowa's Rest Areas

The creation of this booklet has given those who are interested in the history of travel and the interstate highway system an opportunity to learn more about something most of us take for granted. Traveling the state of Iowa to see each rest area may not seem like a destination vacation (and it never was intended to be), but taking a moment to appreciate your surroundings can make an otherwise standard trip from point A to point B across the state much more interesting and relaxing.

There is no reason to believe the Iowa Department of Transportation's commitment to providing clean, modern, beautiful rest areas to Iowa's travelers and visitors to the state will come to an end any time soon. The original ten-year plan for upgrades that began in 2000 has been extended, and at the

time of this publication, at least two new rest areas were being constructed in northern Polk and western Adair Counties.

The long and rich history of Iowa's Rest Area Program, though, has not been forgotten. Today, just as when the program began, each new rest area is constructed with the needs of modern travelers in mind. The recent addition of free Wi-Fi internet access at each of the second-generation rest areas is the latest step towards expanding rest area services to meet these needs. What this means for a future third generation of rest areas is yet to be determined, but undoubtedly, the Iowa Department of Transportation will continue to provide useful and restful oases from the hustle and bustle of the modern roadway.



## Notes

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5. Ibid., 7.
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7. Highway Research Board (1948), 66.
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9. State Conservation Commission, State of Iowa, *Outdoor Recreation in Iowa*. (Des Moines, Iowa: State Conservation Commission, 1968), 89.
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14. Ibid. (1969), 2—16.
15. Highway Research Board, *Report of Committee on Roadside Development* (Washington, D.C.: National Research Council, 1966), 48; Bennett, 167.
16. Highway Research Board (1966), 48.
17. Ibid., 50.
18. Dena M. Gray-Fisher, “One Extraordinary Barn,” *Public Roads* 62, no. 2 (September/October, 1998). Available at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/98sept/oct/barn.cfm> . Last Accessed: March 14, 2013.
19. Ibid.

Background photograph: Sculptural letterpress printing blocks installed in the entry plaza at the eastbound rest area in Johnson County on Interstate 80.





Published by the Iowa Department of Transportation, 2013

Front and back cover photograph: Pathway leading to a designed overlook at the northbound rest area in Decatur County on Interstate 35.