



MISSOURI LEGENDS

III-Fated Times Beach



Mother Road Emporium



Along [Route 66](#) you now see one of [Missouri's](#) newest state parks – the [Route 66](#) State Park. However, this park has an interesting past, as it was once the former site of a resort community on the Meramec River called [Times Beach](#).

Founded in 1925 as a summer resort, investors sold lots for \$67.50. Focusing primarily on St. Louis residents, the investors touted the potential for summer homes just 17 miles away from downtown St. Louis. However, it was not to be. The depression was soon upon them and gas rationing following World War II dashed all hopes for a summer resort. The town eventually developed into a lower-middle class city. Prone to flooding, many of the town's first buildings were built on stilts.



[Route 66](#) State Park near Eureka, [Missouri](#), was once the site of [Times Beach](#).
Kathy Weiser, September, 2004.

In the early 1970s the town could not afford to pave its many dirt road streets and was plagued with a dust problem. To solve the dilemma, the city hired waste hauler Russell Bliss to oil the roads in the town. For four years between 1972 and 1976, Bliss sprayed waste oil on the roads.

Bliss had first used the technique of spraying waste oil to control dust in horse stables. When, in 1971, spraying resulted in the death of 62 horses, the stable owner automatically suspected Bliss of contaminating the stables. However, Bliss assured them that it was simple engine oil that he was spraying. What the city and the stable owners didn't know is that Bliss had subcontracted to haul waste for the Northeastern Pharmaceutical and Chemical Company (NEPACCO) who operated a facility in Verona, [Missouri](#). During the Vietnam War, this facility had been a producer of Agent Orange and the waste clay and water removed from the plant contained levels of dioxin some 2,000 time higher than the dioxin content in Agent Orange. Bliss would later claim he was unaware that the waste contained dioxin. In the meantime, he was spraying the dirt roads of [Times Beach](#), as well as area horse stables, with the lethal material.

As horses continued to die at area stables, the owners contacted the Center for Disease Control and Prevention who began an investigation in 1979. When a NEPACCO employee confessed that the company handled dioxin, the government sued NEPACCO in 1980.

The EPA began to visit [Times Beach](#) in 1982, taking samples and tests that identified dangerous levels of dioxin in [Times Beach](#) soil. In December, 1982, the Meramec River flooded, further spreading the contamination of the town and other areas. Soon, panic spread through the town and every illness and animal death was attributed to dioxin. President Ronald Reagan formed a dioxin task force to study the

effects of the chemical and in early 1983; the EPA announced the town's buyout for \$32 million dollars.



Two years later, in 1985, the entire population of more than 2,000 residents had been evacuated, with the exception of one elderly couple who refused to leave, and the town was dis-incorporated by executive order of the [Missouri](#) Governor. The entire site was quarantined as residents moved on to other areas. But for the residents who moved, the scare was not over, as they continue to worry about the contamination effects on their long term health. Furthermore, with the wide press coverage at the time, the former [Times Beach](#) residents were shunned by their new neighbors, who feared the contamination.

Thousands of lawsuits were filed against Bliss, NEPACCO, and its subcontractors. Though Bliss' practices were questioned, he was never implicated or convicted of a crime. As to the lawsuits involving the chemical companies, no laws were in effect that regulated the disposal of hazardous waste at the time of the disposal.

For years after the evacuation, the site sat silent behind barricades protecting the curious public from the toxic threat, while the Federal Government decided what to do.

During the years of 1996 and 1997 the government removed 265,000 tons of contaminated soil and debris from [Times Beach](#) and 28 other sites in eastern [Missouri](#) at a cost of \$110 million dollars. An incinerator was built on the [Times Beach](#) site by a company called Syntex, who was the parent company of NEPACCO. After the soil was incinerated, the incinerator was dismantled and the site was turned over to the State of [Missouri](#).

The 1983 buyout of the town by the federal government was the first time such a thing had ever occurred in the history of our nation. The [Times Beach](#) tragedy brought dioxin to national attention and the EPA continued to locate and clean-up dozens of other toxic waste dumps throughout the nation. It also provided the push to pass new environmental laws regulating waste disposal.

Though dioxin has been connected to cancer, skin diseases, immune disorders, and birth defects, the long term effect on the exposed residents is still unknown.

After the site was turned over to the State of [Missouri](#) with the EPA's assurance that the land was safe, [Missouri](#) began to make plans for the site and the idea of the [Route 66](#) State Park began to take shape.

The 419-acre [Route 66](#) State Park re-opened in October, 1999. Today the park includes a chunk of old [Route 66](#) including the historic bridge across the Meramec River. The visitor center, housed in a 1935 roadhouse that was once called Steiny's Inn, features a museum on the historic highway, as well as the history of [Times Beach](#) and the environmental cleanup.



Old [Route 66](#) bridge over the Meramec River in the [Route 66](#) State Park, September, 2004, Kathy Weiser.

The park itself provides more than seven miles of trails for hiking, biking and equestrian use, where visitors can see a multitude of wildlife including turkey, geese, deer, and more than forty species of birds. Picnic sites abound and a boat ramp provides easy access to the Meramec River. The [Route 66](#) State Park is located on I-44 at exit 266.

After visiting the [Route 66](#) State Park, you can continue on the [Mother Road](#) through Eureka on your way to

the [Pacific](#) area. While in Eureka, you can visit the Six Flags Theme Park for a wild roller coaster ride, or check out the Wild Canid Center, a breeding facility for endangered wolves from around the world.

Kathy Weiser/Legends of America, © February, 2005



A postcard from the 1950s shows the building in its previous life as *Steiny's Inn*, then one of the area's most popular roadside restaurants.

Postcard from *The Missouri U.S. 66 Tour Book*.



The [Route 66](#) State Park Visitor Center is housed in the old Steiny's Inn building.

Photo courtesy of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.



This vintage sign stands next to The Visitor Center - it once was in front of the Key's Cafe in Franklin County. The sign was donated to the park by the family. September, 2004, Kathy Weiser.



[To Pacific](#)



[Return to Route 66](#)



[To Meramec River Resorts](#)