

2018 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

The Nite Spot Café

- **Location:** Collinsville Road and 45th Street, Fairmont City, St. Clair County
- **Built:** Unknown
- **Architect:** Unknown
- **Current owner:** Galas Family
- **Historic significance:** An iconic location along Illinois' portion of Route 66 that once served the many travelers on America's "Mother Road."
- **Why it is endangered:** The site sits vacant and in need of maintenance. It also faces demolition as a nearby library wishes to acquire the site to build an expansion.



Credit: Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway

Each year, tens of thousands of visitors explore Illinois on Route 66 in search of the neon signs, motels and brick roads that characterize the "Mother Road." However, many businesses along Route 66 have shuttered, their neon signs going dark for the foreseeable future. The Nite Spot Café (and its iconic neon sign) is but one example, as it is now threatened by the expansion of a nearby library complex.

In the 1920s, the creation of Route 66 gained immediate popularity as the shortest year-round route between the Midwest and the Southwest. As Americans bought cars and journeyed on the highways after World War II, a unique roadside culture of diners, motels and tourist kitsch became synonymous with Route 66.

With the creation of the Interstate Highway System in 1956, Route 66 could easily be bypassed and the local economies of communities along the historic route suffered. Despite motels closing and neon signs going dark, Route 66's popularity continued to grow among domestic and international travelers seeking to have a uniquely American experience along the open road.

Now, over 90 years old, the 2,400-mile highway from Chicago to Los Angeles remains an economic force in Illinois tourism despite preservation challenges. Rural economic development resources remain limited and many historic motels and restaurants remain shuttered.

One of these is The Nite Spot Café. Purchased in 1947 when it was just a one-room building in a junkyard, Adam and Anne Galas renovated the building in order to turn it into a 24/7 restaurant for tourists and truckers traveling on Route 66. The restaurant did more than serve food though; it sold various personal care items and household goods. Additionally, around Christmas, truckers could place orders through The Nite Spot for holiday gifts, which they would then pick up on their way home.

The prominent neon sign in front of the restaurant was added in the 1960s after the interstate was built adjacent to Route 66. It was meant to grab the attention of those traveling on the new bypass and has been a Route 66 icon ever since. Anne Galas was able to keep the restaurant open following the death of her husband in 1978, but was forced to close in 1984 when her own health began to deteriorate. The restaurant has been closed since, but recently the next two generations of Galas family members have worked toward the goal of reopening the building as a Route 66 destination. In addition, they are pursuing listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Despite the building's potential as a Route 66 landmark, Fairmont City officials have moved to condemn and demolish the building. The Galas family has documented their plans to move forward with structural repairs to the foundation and exterior wall this year, but will face a court appearance with the City this summer. While city officials have not stated their intentions for the site, The Nite Spot Café is adjacent to the Fairmont City Library Center and Bank of Edwardsville.

What you can do:

- If you'd like to assist in the National Register nomination process, please contact Frank Butterfield, Springfield Office Director, at 217-836-2524 or fbutterfield@landmarks.org.
- Contact Fairmont City Trustees to tell them that you support the rehabilitation of The Nite Spot Café: <http://fairmontcityil.com/pages/administration.html>

Additional Links:

- Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway: <http://www.illinoisroute66.org/>