



King of the Road: Bill Shea

The greatest artifact in Bill Shea's Route 66 Gas Station Museum might just be Bill himself. For nearly four decades Bill pumped gas along Route 66 and he kept everything he could put his hands on: oil cans, calendars, signs, glass cabinets, a 15-cent-a-pack cigarette machine, old cash registers, an 80-year-old peanut dispenser, an oil company pump jack, and on and on. Now in his eighties, Bill has dedicated himself and his former gas station to the memory of the Mother Road. "I've no intention of retiring. I'll keep working until I'm 90, then maybe just work half days."

Open year round, Tuesday through Friday, 7am to 4pm, and on Saturday 'til noon, Shea's Gas Station Museum, located along a Route 66 alignment at 2075 Peoria Road, is home to some of the finest Route 66 collectibles you'll ever see. A Hall of Fame member of the Route 66 Association of Illinois, it's not unusual to find Bill playing host to visitors from all over the globe, including Australia, China and Ireland. You're just as likely to catch him being interviewed by national and international travel writers, film producers and radio hosts.

Bill's museum has been the subject of a public television special in Boston, featured in *People* magazine, and listed in scores of tourism publications and consumer magazines. "We don't sell anything and we don't charge anybody to come and look around. However, donations are appreciated." This simple philosophy is mirrored in the signage you'll find on the walls, "If you write in our dust, please don't put the date."

Along with a row of shiny red petrol pumps, you'll find Bill's original Texaco uniform and a narration from him on those bygone days. He recently restored a 14 by 14-ft gas station he purchased from the Mahon family in Middletown. The former Philips 66 station is one of the oldest, and possibly the first, gas station in Illinois. Along with his son and two grandsons, Bill repainted the metal exterior to its original colors and filled the inside with treasures from its operating days.

The next time you find yourself with a few extra hours, stop by Bill's Route 66 Gas Station Museum, sit down on the back seat of an old Chevy and let Bill take you back to a delightful place in time along Route 66.

###