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Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

Motel San Jose

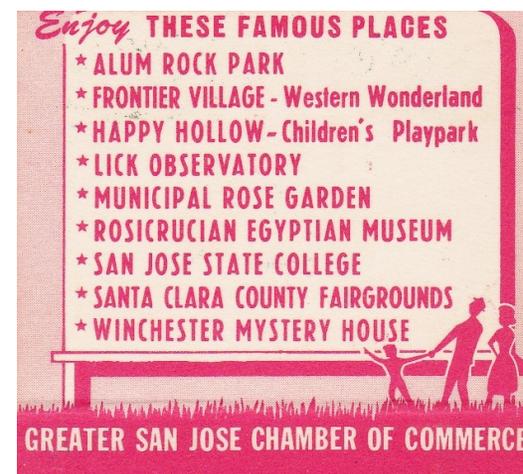
by Heather M. David

Les Amis (The Friends)

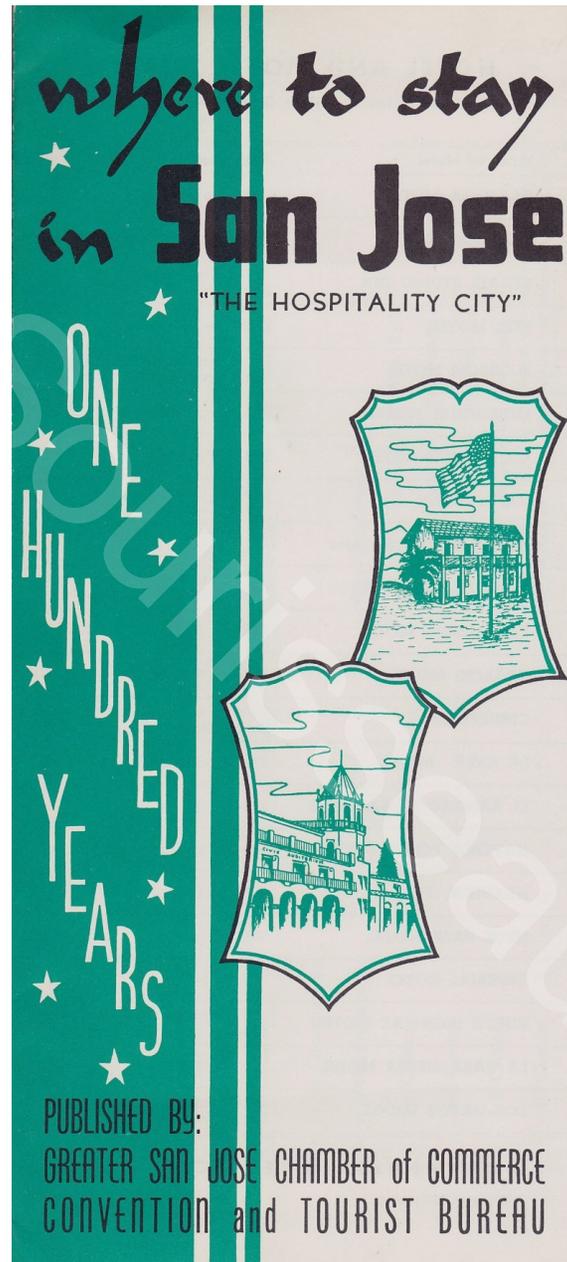
May 2016

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[59] **California's Fastest Growing Area.** From 1950 to 1969, the city of San Jose expanded from 17 to 120 square miles and its population nearly quintupled. Aggressive economic expansion drew people to the area in record numbers, for work as well as pleasure. By the early 1960s, Santa Clara County was being marketed as "California's Fastest Growing Area" and San Jose was "California's Greatest City." Popular attractions included the Winchester Mystery House, the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, and Frontier Village.



[60] **Where to Stay in San Jose.** Evidence of this period of great transformation can be gathered in a myriad of ways, but San Jose's sharp increase in roadside motels is one indicator. As the area's population grew, so did the number of motels. The majority of these businesses were located along the main thoroughfares into town, and it was not uncommon for there to be multiple motel options along one city block.



PEPPER TREE INN—SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA—"60 UNITS"

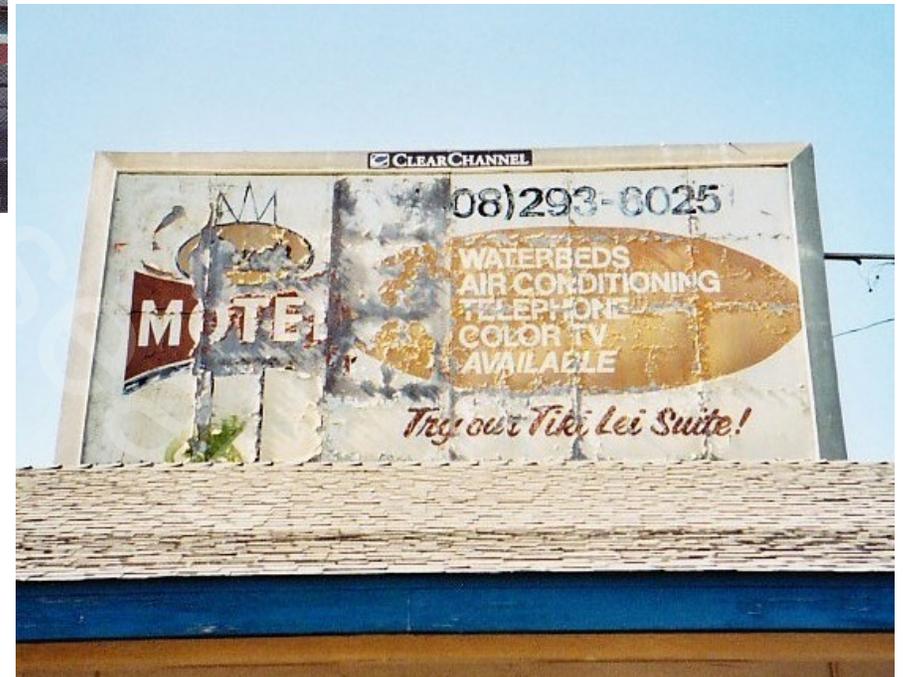
[61] **HI-WAY Motel and Pepper Tree Inn.** In the 1950s, there were numerous motels along San Jose's stretch of the 101 highway. Highway 101 was once the main route between the northern and southern parts of California. San Jose's Hi-Way Motel started as an auto court, with 45 heated cottages. Over the years, the motel added rooms, changed its name to the Pepper Tree Inn, and built "the largest motel pool in Santa Clara County."

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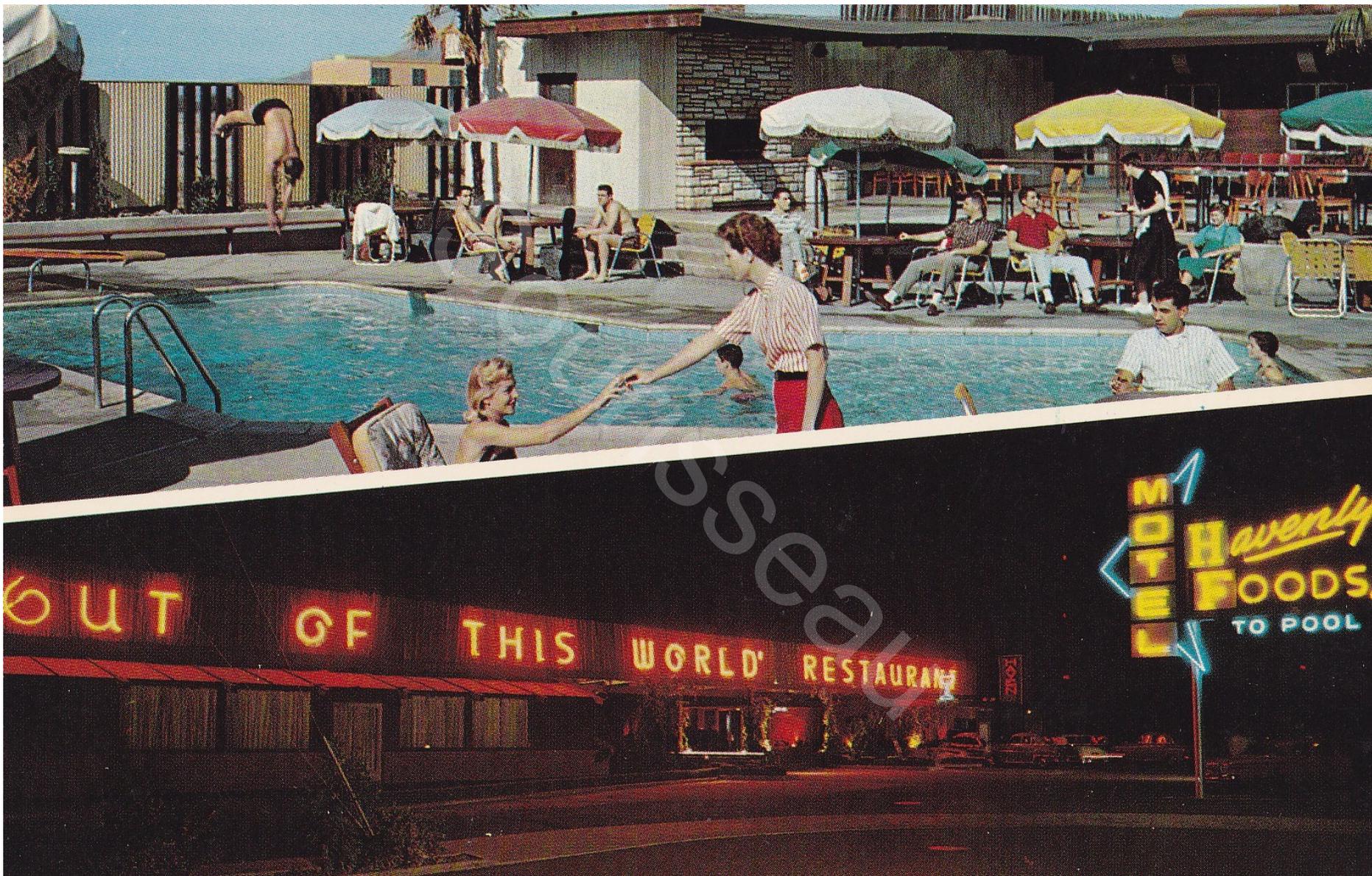
[62] **Motel check-in.** In an effort to attract customers in a highly competitive market, independent “mom and pop” motels courted their patrons with eye-popping neon signage, convenient dining, air-conditioning, and swimming pools. Some motel owners even adopted exotic themes as a marketing differentiator. Others offered cocktail lounges, nightly dancing, putting greens, and shuffleboard courts.

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[63] **Sands Motel.** The Sands Motel originated as the 101 Motel along a stretch of South 1st Street, Monterey Highway designated as a "101 Business" route. At some point in the 1950s, the 101 Motel became the Sands, the name change perhaps inspired by the popularity of the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas. The hosts of the Sands Motel – Mary Lou and Barney Wyman – were committed to providing their guests with a memorable stay. In the 1960s, they even added a special "Tiki Lei Suite."

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[64] **Havenly Foods.** Once a haven for weary travelers along Highway 101, “among the world’s finest freeways,” San Jose’s Havenly Foods Motel featured comfortable accommodations and an “out of this world” restaurant with winged waitresses! Alas, the motel is no longer of this world but proof of its existence can be found in mirro-krome postcards, matchbooks, and ashtrays.



[65] **City Center Motel.** Curiously absent from San Jose's City Center Motel postcard is its neon diving lady sign. Positioned strategically about a half-block from the motel, the sign is nearly impossible to miss from the freeway. This grand dame of motel swimmers is the last of her kind in the South Bay Area. She was once one of several neon diving ladies.



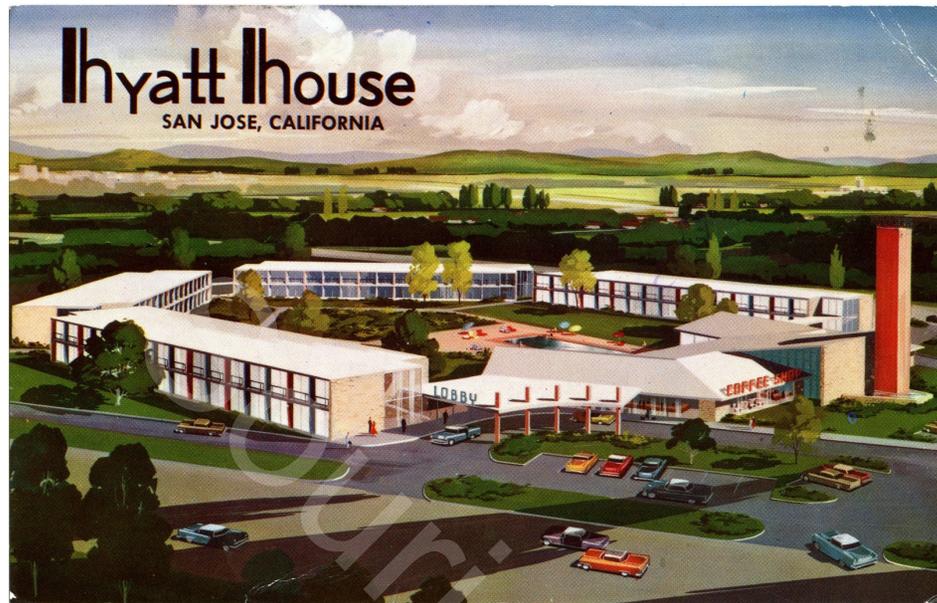
[66] **Travelodge.** Over time, consolidation and corporatization drove Mom and Pop out of the motel business. Theme-based marketing was pushed aside for standardization. Gorgeous neon signs were replaced with cheaper backlit plastic or monument signs. Interior décor became bland and conservative. Mirroring a nationwide trend, San Jose's first chain motels arrived in the mid-1950s. Travelodge, a motel chain based in San Diego, introduced its first motel to San Jose in 1956.

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[67] **Auditorium Travel Inn and Sambo's.** Reflecting a customer desire for predictability, referral chains also came on the scene. San Jose's Auditorium Travel Inn proudly advertised that it was part of the Best Western network of motels. The Travel Inn offered "true luxury at modest rates" and "every conceivable convenience," including a 24-hour Sambo's coffee shop.

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[68] **Hyatt House.** Capitalizing on the increase in business travel to the region, the Bay Area's first Hyatt House "Fly-In" Hotel opened in 1961 near the San Jose Airport. The hotel featured four modern two-story buildings for accommodations, a restaurant, cocktail lounge and coffee shop, all positioned around a central courtyard with a swimming pool and putting green. Nightly dancing and limousine service, too!

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[69] **MoteLodge and Airport Inn.** Today, Silicon Valley residents are witnessing another remarkable transformation. The Valley's post-war architecture is rapidly disappearing. Many of San Jose's mid-century era motels have been, or are being, demolished for high density residential and commercial development. While some of these monuments to postwar prosperity have disappeared from the visual landscape – perhaps only to be experienced in the memory banks of former patrons – others remain standing as physical records of an earlier time.