

Kutztown University
Research Commons at Kutztown University

English Department: Traveling American
Modernism Posters (ENG 366, Fall 2018)

English Department

Fall 12-11-2018

Visionaries of the Road

Storm A. Wright

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, swrig015@live.kutztown.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/englishENG366posters>



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wright, Storm A., "Visionaries of the Road" (2018). *English Department: Traveling American Modernism Posters (ENG 366, Fall 2018)*.
4.
<https://research.library.kutztown.edu/englishENG366posters/4>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the English Department at Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Department: Traveling American Modernism Posters (ENG 366, Fall 2018) by an authorized administrator of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact czerny@kutztown.edu.

Visionaries of the Road

KUTZTOWN
UNIVERSITY

By Storm Wright

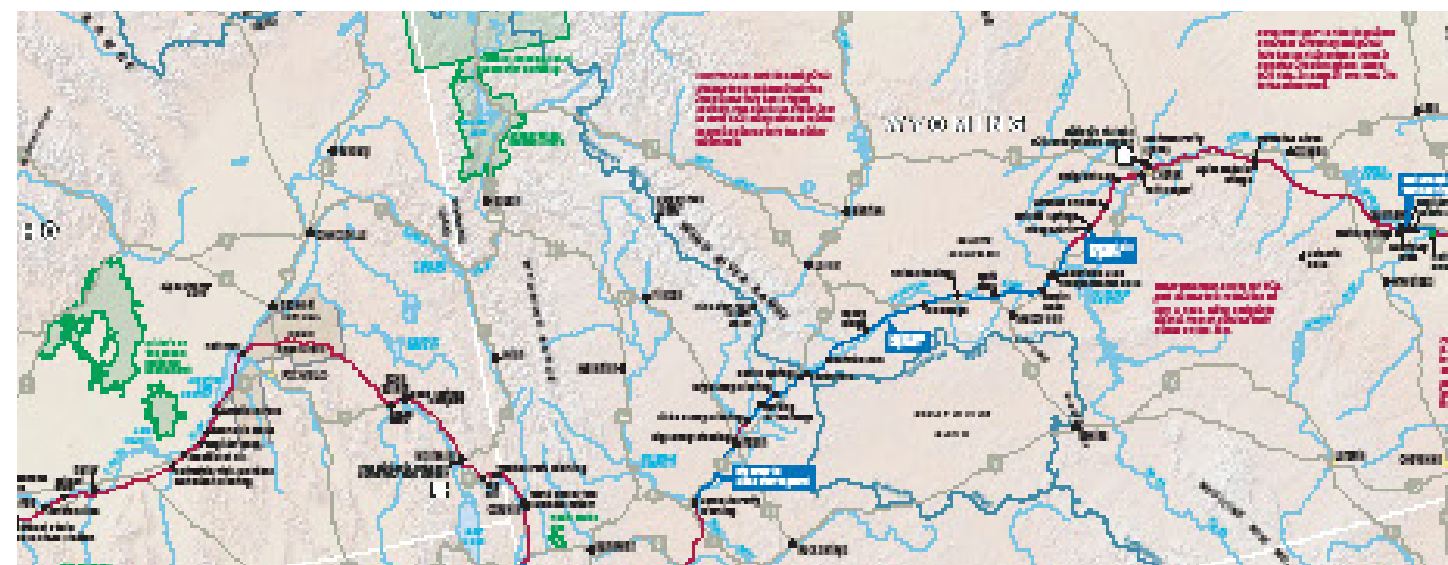
It is thought that drives people forward to do things that others do not think to do, as with Meeker and Heat-Moon, or that others think are impossible, like with Nelson Jackson. Thought leads to discovery, and discovery brings about new space that has yet to be explored; from there, it is the artistic license of each explorer that allows him to take the space he has discovered, look to the rest of the world, and invite them into the space with him. It allows him to share his troubles, his discoveries, and his experiences, and lets him open a dialogue to the public that says anyone could do this, if he or she took the leap and gave it a try. If Meeker had not taken a leap at 77 years old, the Oregon Trail would be lost to the ages; if Nelson Jackson had not taken a dare, he never would have shown the country that driving cross-country is possible; if Heat-Moon had not lost his job, he never would have traveled to and written about the lost small towns that litter the country. How is it, then, that each one of these three men were able to share their space with the rest of the country, and what impact did their travels inflict on how the population of the United States view travel?



Ezra Meeker
Photo Courtesy of Museum of History and Industry

“Ox-Team days on the Oregon Trail”, by Ezra Meeker (1922)

It was his trip from Puyallup, Washington, to Washington, D.C., that began Meeker’s formation—or rather, his reformation—of space. The Oregon Trail had been a space that he shared with many pioneers in its heyday, but as the years passed since the final pioneer ended the trail, that space was becoming less and less relevant and slowly forgotten to the past. For Meeker, the idea of the trail being forgotten was unfathomable. “I longed to go back over the old Oregon Trail and mark it for all time for the children of the pioneers who blazed it,” he had said. “and for the world.” (162)



Map of the Oregon Trail
Photo Courtesy of National Park Service

“Ocean to Ocean in a Winton”, from Auto Era (1903)

Before their trip, the vehicles that crossed the country had been wagons pulled by oxen like Meeker had done. The terrains in the middle and the west of the United States were not paved for a car to travel on smoothly, shown throughout the letter Nelson Jackson wrote to Auto Era as he spoke of how the Vermont lost ball bearings, broke stud bolts, and ran poorly due to the lack of lubricating oil that they had to replace with axle grease. “It was a crime the way in which we were often forced to abuse that motor,” Nelson Jackson had said. “The wonder is that any automobile could successfully master the difficulties we forced our Winton into.” (“Ocean to Ocean” 10) Of course, that is not to say that trips of this nature were never attempted before—especially along the desert terrain—but, according to Auto Era, the trip that Nelson Jackson and Croker took in their Winton was the first successful trip.



Horatio Nelson Jackson
Photo Courtesy of Vintage Everyday

“Blue Highways”, by William Least Heat-Moon

As shown in Heat-Moon’s book, Blue Highways, some of the best life lessons and self-discovery can come from taking the time to both take roads less traveled and talk to the locals to hear their stories. That is exactly what Heat-Moon did after he lost his job. He took a few essentials, got into his car, and drove off to explore: “After that, the 42,000 miles of straight and wide could lead to hell for all I cared; I was going to stay on the three million miles of bent and narrow rural American two-lane, the roads to Podunk and Toonerville. Into the sticks, the boon-docks, the burgs, backwaters, jerk-waters, the wide-spots-in-the-road, the don’t-blink-or-you’ll-miss-it towns. Into those places where you say, ‘My god! What if you lived here!’ The Middle of Nowhere.” (16)



William Least Heat-Moon with his van, Ghost Dancing
Photo Courtesy of Blue Highways Revisited