Outside Lies Magic

Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places

John R. Stilgoe

WALKER AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

Seven

Main Street

WHILE DISNEY CREATED EPCOT, the experimental prototypical community of tomorrow, at Disney World, real estate developers across the United States began tinkering with another sort of community, one focused, indeed fixated, on the past. In the 1970s, developers figured out that many Americans wanted to live in the stereotypical small town that Disney had stumbled onto years earlier in Disneyland, the gentle, human-scale, main-street-focused place in which people behaved themselves and automobiles seemed less than necessary. Bound up in nostalgic visual images on calendars and postcards, on syrupy 1960s television shows like *Mayberry RFD* and *Green Acres* and *Petticoat Junction,* on the jackets of long-ago best-sellers by Sinclair Lewis and recent

triumphs by John Cheever, perhaps most important on the covers of hundreds of children's and young-adult novels proffered by well-meaning librarians and schoolteachers after the 1960s, books like Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes,* nostalgia for the small town of fiction began driving the cosmetic makeover of small towns, at least of small-town shopping streets, everywhere in the country, and in time led to the creation of residential enclaves planned to look like something from some near-fictional past.

Stripping off vinyl and aluminum siding, replacing plate glass with mullion windows, and above all cleaning and repointing brick facades struck small-town chambers of commerce as the classy way to reinvigorate main-street retailing in an era just after the interstate evisceration of urban downtowns. Stunned by the new discount stores sparkling amid the acres of free parking created along nearby bypasses, store owners and landlords embraced the historic preservation movement as a way of getting something new and actually quite nice simply by removing the cheap facades of 1950s modernism. Somehow, they suspected, the sandblasted redbrick and ornate window and door trim reflected the timelessness, the rock-solid quality of another age. The explorer walking slowly and thoughtfully through any restored main

street early Sunday morning glimpses the dates built into facades or the local historical society date-plates recently bolted on others, and marvels that whole "business blocks" and indeed entire streets seem to have been built at the same moment. Perhaps the explorer walks a bit farther, maybe over to Second Street, spots a massive, equipment-filled firehouse, and begins to think about the past that was, not the past imagined by television producers and advertising managers.

Explorers know firehouses well, for firehouses provide public rest rooms. Most small towns pour money into fire departments, and even villages usually boast handsome structures and engines paid for by nonprofit fire-department-support societies. The wide overhead door, raised on all but the stormiest days, and almost always open on weekends and in the evenings, reveals pumpers and rescue trucks, ambulances and forest-fire engines, sometimes lined up three and four abreast, often two deep, every truck emblazoned with the town crest and town name. Immaculate and gleaming, the fire trucks wait, solemnly announcing that never again will Main Street burn down, as it did in 1884, 1890, 1907, or whenever it did, forcing its owners to rebuild, and to rebuild in brick.

Any exploring bicyclist riding from town to town,

perhaps pedaling a *century*—a hundred-mile trip consuming a dawn-to-dusk summer Saturday—senses that cosmetic makeover masks the long-burned but never-forgotten wooden main-street fabrics of the last century. Small-town explorers move always into the murk of fire insurance protocol, mortgage systems, all the intricacies of finance that gird the building of anything. But the main-street world re-created so lovingly by Disney, then by small-town chambers of commerce caught up in 1960s and 1970s historic preservation, perhaps best reflects the stunning power of fire insurance companies to shape building.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, fire insurance firms worried that street trees might communicate fire, especially in autumn. One chimney fire spitting sparks might torch a tree, and then the wind might shower adjacent roofs with flaming leaves as tree after tree exploded. So went the worry, and so ran the insurance policies mandating cancellation of coverage or increased premiums if owners or municipal government planted street trees. Until well into the nineteenth century (and certainly long before the age of electric lines), villages lacked street trees not because villagers lacked aesthetic awareness but simply because they lacked the tax base to purchase hand-drawn and hand-operated, then horse-drawn, steam-driven fire-fighting engines. For as long as vil-

lagers relied on bucket brigades, fire insurance companies demanded all sorts of environmental fire-prevention efforts, among them tin roofs and no street trees.

But in larger towns able to afford fire engines, fire insurance companies allowed the planting of street trees, especially if commercial structures stood built in brick. The contemporary explorer walking or biking past signs boasting that a small town has joined the list of "Tree Cities USA" for its planting and care of street trees knows that the town also boasts a splendid firehouse filled with gleaming equipment, all of which is enumerated by insurance companies classifying municipalities, then setting premiums on individual properties. The links between street trees and fire engines, so old that townspeople often know nothing of them, endure as powerfully and grimly as the ranking of fire departments according to manpower, equipment, and training programs, the ranking that determines homeowner fire insurance premium rates as ruthlessly as does the location of every structure from the nearest hydrant.

But fire engines notwithstanding, main streets burned by the dozen in the late nineteenth century in a nationwide way historians are just now beginning to study. Maybe some careless storekeeper neglected to put out his cat some night. For decades, farmers'

almanacs and householders' guides warned cat owners to keep cats outdoors, especially on winter nights, lest the feline craving for warmth lead to cats afire, racing through houses and stores "communicating fire everywhere." But more likely, some wood-burning stove flared up, started a chimney fire hot enough to crumble mortar and bricks, and provided townspeople with disaster and opportunity. When Main Street burned down, it meant momentary prosperity for Second Street or Railroad Street or whatever street paralleled or intersected the chief retail and office street of a town and became for a year or so the location of businesses in temporary quarters. Even more important, it meant a clean slate on one or both sides of the retail and social armature of a town.

Nowadays small-town main streets often look so seamlessly beautiful, so evenly textured, simply because they rose rebuilt in brick or sandstone at the same moment, redone by property owners not only sharing social and aesthetic values but sharing insurance company payoff checks that bankrolled at least the first floor or the facade of a dozen new buildings. What the explorer sees with eyes momentarily closed and imagination spinning is the spectacle of late-nineteenth-century people shopping in an all-new place on a street lined with brand-new buildings, each erected in the latest style, and each erected with

due regard for the buildings on either side. Almost never does the explorer find an outstanding building along any postconflagration small-town main street, but almost never does she or he discover one especially ugly either. What rewards the explorer strolling three or four times along most main streets is not the display of structures erected at the same time but the continuity of facade created by property owners and architects determined to make both sides of a retail and office street reflect and support common values.

Somehow, the explorer muses, the same spirit informs the contemporary building of planned residential enclaves. Maybe residents of the new enclaves buy a sort of nostalgia blended of safety and stability, seeking in well-built houses and condominiums something of the solidity of Main Street after the fire. Do brick buildings whisper of safety from fire after all this time? Do they somehow shape national memory still?

Now and again the bicyclist pauses along Main Street and buys an ice-cold can of Coca-Cola. How many other products endure essentially unchanged from the late 1880s? The explorer who sits on a wood-and-cast-iron bench and sips a Coca-Cola glances down at the can shimmering with condensation and ponders the issue, and ponders too the name of the soft drink Coca-Cola Classic. What is classic now in

the whole built environment, now at the turn of the millennium? The light that reflects from the moist can is not the light that danced eight decades ago from the ribbed, green-glass bottle, but somehow it illuminates the longevity of some things in a time of newness triumphant. Someone, the explorer realizes, sat on the bench in 1929 and drank a Coca-Cola and wondered what the stock-market news might mean. Someone sat on the bench in 1942 and wondered if Britain would last until American forces arrived. And someone sat on the bench and watched the facade of modernism, of the International Style, ripped from the storefronts in the late 1960s. Is the taste of Coca-Cola the taste of momentary respite from activity, the taste that makes explorers realize the need for a break, for a time to think about exploring?

THE SMALL TOWN endures as the national attic of American social and spatial consciousness, a sort of frame through which further vistas are invariably viewed and twisted to fit. Always the small town is *out there*, somewhere in the Midwest, the western South, the upper Mississippi Basin, northern New England, the Pacific Northwest, the upper High Plains, and always the disenchanted city dweller or suburbanite can drive there, get out, not lock the car,

somehow be home. Given the staggering bias toward small-town living implicit in public and private school reading books from kindergarten onward, it is no wonder that big-city adults understand, albeit vaguely, something about small-town way of life and small-town space.

The small town—essentially a group of stores and offices set around the main street armature, a second group of businesses, chiefly wholesale and light manufacturing and repairing, focused on a parallel street, and then the houses lining a dozen or so residential streets merging into farmland—is quintessentially childhood space. Even at midday, automobile traffic moves slowly, almost sedately, so children can move quickly, safely, sometimes running from late twentieth century into a past so remote it aches, as when a rare grade school still adjourns for lunch, and at least some children sprint home for hot soup. After school and all summer, children run errands for parents, running down to the supermarket, biking over to the farm-supply store, visiting and chatting and forgetting and hurrying in a sort of haphazard way now and then recovered by moviemakers somehow certain that the small town in 1890 was the best of all possible worlds for children if not for factory workers unemployed following the Panic.

In the 1960s, enough shopping mall developers

and designers understood small-town space and walking habits that they tried to mimic them—and failed. Even today, few malls contain so-called male-dominated stores, especially hardware stores and auto-parts stores. Mall developers tried in the 1970s to arrange stores in zigzag patterns, hoping to put a men's clothing store immediately across the concourse from one selling women's clothes, then put two gender-neutral stores—say, a greeting card and a photography store—across from each other, then another pair of gender-separated stores, but quickly learned that mall rents excluded all sorts of male-focused stores.

By the 1980s, especially as established malls lost and gained stores by attrition and so could not control the placement of stores along concourses, mall owners realized with mounting horror that attrition sometimes placed a few male-oriented stores all at one end of a mall and left the remainder of the mall filled with stores aimed only at women. No longer could they even hope that husbands and wives, girlfriends and boyfriends might promenade together, shop hand in hand, and above all spend money together. Instead they watched men congregate at nodes created by accidental location and relocation of a handful of stores, perhaps an electronics store, a hobby shop, a music store, more recently a computer game/software store. And they discovered in late 1980s recession

surveys that people went to malls not always to buy but for free recreation and entertainment, that the mall had become ever more like the small town, that increasingly couples fight in the cars out in the parking lot, that men no longer like malls, that men are far more likely to visit stores not in malls, say Wal-Mart and Home Depot and gigantic bookstores sitting alone in immense parking lots.

The explorer figures out, slowly, maybe sipping an ice-cold Coca-Cola Classic, maybe eating vanilla ice cream, how the small-town Main Street still works. The explorer understands how much of it still depends on things Americans so rarely discuss, things like parking.

TYPICALLY, MAIN STREET is wide not only because its founders envisioned it as a sort of boulevard, another Broad Street or Broadway, but because width makes for lots of light and air and fire retardation, and above all, width lets people admire buildings, especially three-story buildings, from a better vantage point than narrowness. But by 1915 or so, the width of so many small-town main streets provided something else, something for which no one planned but something that proved to have immediate value. The wide main street let motorists angle park.

Angle parking remains a small-town main-street

attribute rarely recognized as something motorists and merchants find utterly delicious. The motorist pulls easily into the angled space and shuts off his or her engine while looking into a store window, perhaps not the window of the store that prompted the visit to Main Street, but certainly a window stocked with items that might attract a visit, even a purchase. And the motorist leaves almost equally effortlessly, and with a bit of panache, backing into the wide street, head craned to see oncoming cars. The backing car not only slows, then blocks traffic, causing stopped motorists to glance around at store windows, but the potential for encountering backing cars makes all motorists slow down and drive warily. Even the cruising bicyclist slows and watches carefully for any rearward movement, any brake lights or back-up lights.

Decades ago, angle parking struck men as women-friendly. By the 1930s, as cars grew heavy and long but well before the advent of inexpensive power steering, women learned what men knew: Parallel parking demanded not only skill and strength but the attention and goodwill of the motorist behind, the motorist who had to stop short, and perhaps even back up, while the parking motorist maneuvered backward into a space that might prove too short. Tall women, like tall men, parallel parked best, partly because when reversing they could see farther to the

right, but largely because they could brace themselves against floorboards and turn the large wheels that levered big-wheeled, awesomely stiff front ends. Trained drivers knew parallel parking was merely a trick: Given parked cars all of the same length, one merely pulls one's front wheels parallel to the front wheels of the car parked in front of the empty space, turns the steering wheel fully to the right, reverses until one's front wheels are parallel to the rear wheels of the car in front of the space, then spins the steering wheel all the way to the left, then backs almost to the front bumper of the car behind the space.

The trick worked into the middle 1960s, when motorists discovered the new geometrics of parallel parking behind a Volkswagen, then behind the flood of tiny cars from Asia. By the late 1960s, the combination of shopping-mall and commercial-strip parking lots and the widely disparate lengths of automobiles drove many hitherto accurate parallel parkers to distraction, even after they bought cars equipped with power steering. No longer made to practice parallel parking routinely, and faced with short cars that wrecked techniques, parallel parkers lost their skills and lost the ability to teach teenagers. Twenty years later, many states eliminated the parallel parking requirement from driver's license examinations. Too many teenagers flunked.

Angle parking endures, then, as a small-town

bonus, but usually only along Main Street. On Second Street and the other less important commercial streets, customers expect to parallel park or pull into small lots, many still unpaved, built on the sites of long-demolished buildings. Merchants pay higher rent for Main Street locations, although often not nearly the rents paid for shopping mall space, in large part because angle parking makes Main Street work for the errand-running shopper, the woman driving into town to buy a greeting card, the man stopping for a haircut, the teenagers pulling in for ice cream. Quick in, quick out, what so many shoppers want when they want it. But then, angle parking, simply because it slows through traffic, subtly shifts it onto some parallel street, which often does at least a few merchants some good.

Only along Main Street does window shopping from cars remind the explorer that woman-driver jokes originated long after the introduction of the flivver and never gained much currency in cities too jammed with traffic to permit, let alone reward, window shopping. The woman driver of so many low-life comedian jokes originated in small towns, when women simply stopped on Main Street to glance at a sign screaming "sale" or slowed to study a new window display. Most small-town women understood simply that Main Street existed largely for them, and

that they controlled behavior along it. Men fumed, swore at slow-moving cars drifting slightly to the right or left, then shook heads in astonishment at impromptu, unsignaled turns into angled spaces. Only rarely did they admit among themselves that the small-town women drivers almost never hit anything and had accident rates far lower than those of the men who prided themselves on never looking right or left, at zooming along meandering roads lined with utility poles, at racing mail trains to grade crossings.

Angle-parking and slow-moving, eye-wandering women drivers made Main Street safe for roaming children, and dogs, even bicyclists, who discover when they ride from exurbs into rural countryside that however dangerous backing cars might be, they represent less of a danger than parallel-parked driver doors flung open in their path. The planners and developers of American *joka-machi* struggle with fences and buffer zones and speed bumps to accomplish something that small towns provided in the horse-drawn age and still provide today: a safe place for kids. And however much small-town kids may pine for the big-city excitement they see on television, few of them want to live behind the fences of planned residential developments. Who wants to live where one has to ask Mom to drive all the way to the comic-book store? Why not bicycle to the comic-book store,

leave one's bike unlocked on the sidewalk, and spend an hour inside among one's friends?

Small-town children know what the explorer discovers only after much scrutiny. Small-town retail space today shelters a rich mix of commercial operations that make shopping mall concourses extraordinarily dull. Some proportion of the diversity originates in the murk of fire insurance policies and commercial leases. Many shopping mall proprietors simply prohibit merchants from selling any flammable liquids at all, and many others forbid the sale of any secondhand merchandise. The would-be hardware store owner discovers that prohibitions against selling kerosene and refilling propane tanks automatically deflect would-be buyers of lanterns and gas grills, and the would-be hobby shop owner realizes that regulations against selling everything from tenth-hand Lionel trains to secondhand comic books and Magic Cards eliminate profitable lines of business. So Main Street fills not with marginal businesses but with businesses that either cannot or will not afford shopping mall rents or shopping mall restrictions. Even stodgy chambers of commerce slowly realize that given a healthy mix of such main-street businesses, new shopping malls or discount stores represent very little threat indeed.

The explorer discovers reassuring realities. Wal-

Mart sells no marine paint, but the Main Street paint store still furnishes paint to yachtsmen fitting out in April. Home Depot sells no beekeeping supplies, but the Main Street hardware store still furnishes supers, foundation, and hive tools in the back room, adjacent to canning supplies, a few aisles away from harness-repair tools needed by little girls owning their first ponies. The music store at the shopping mall sells a few electric guitars, but the Main Street music store displays, sells, and delivers used acoustic guitars, electric guitars, even pianos, and upstairs has a music studio complete with after-school piano teacher. Main Street stores offer the prospect of treasure finding.

Hobby shops and sporting goods stores still enliven Main Street, still compete well against both shopping mall stores and mail-order firms, even against category-buster megastores. In large part, they succeed because they buy and sell used goods, their stock turns over frequently and unexpectedly, and they have a much larger clientele than many motorists suppose. The explorer probing on Saturdays glimpses the out-of-state license plates on the cars angled parked before the stores, and stops to scrutinize. What brings customers from so far away? Inside the answers are everywhere, in cardboard boxes beneath and behind counters, on shelves lining back

rooms, on goods hanging from ceilings. Always the stock is changing, and every day something old turns up. No wonder so many small-town main-street stores do such a large mail-order business, something the explorer notices in late afternoon, when the UPS man leaves the stores carrying boxes, not empty-handed.

Main Street always inveigles the bicyclist-explorer, because the bicyclist knows that bicycle stores locate in small towns where bicycling is still seen as safe and fun, and where bicycle store owners find the medium-rent locations that reward the buying and selling and trading of secondhand and twelfth-hand bicycles. No matter that the exploring bicyclist is well equipped with spare tube, tools, and air pump. The bicyclist, like all explorers, inspects all sources of potential help and resupply, and finds that main-street bicycle stores invariably offer a rest room to any bicyclist and to anyone else too. And like the hobby shop, the sporting goods store, the bookstore, like so many shops along the small-town main street, the bicycle store reveals the same stunning range of prices. Swaying on cables strung from the ceiling, the $3,500 Merlin awaits a buyer more rare than the proud mother inquiring after a used sidewalk bike priced around fifteen bucks. Somewhere in the back of the shop is a workbench, an air compressor, and a

rack of tools, where the exploring bicyclist can get a broken spoke fixed on short notice, where young children hang around, learning how a bike gets assembled quickly, where a bike-smitten high school girl finds a job that pays better than the fast-food place on the bypass.

In the 1970s, perhaps in the energy-crisis years especially, merchants who had lost faith in Main Street and relocated to commercial-strip stores realized that the empty storefronts they left behind had begun to fill with experimental businesses, often ones owned by women. When those businesses prospered, the renegades frequently attempted to move back and discovered that Main Street had been taken over by handicraft and antique dealers, and those businesspeople, especially the women antique dealers, riding a retailing wave rarely noticed in newspapers and business journals, had begun the boutiquing of Main Street, adding greatly to its richness.

Isolated antique dealers struggle to attract customers. A cluster of antique shops along Main Street enables a group of dealers to prosper as components of a larger whole, while giving each proprietor the freedom of a self-contained storefront. No special overhead or operating regulations plague the group or its individual members, and the stores offer almost perfect spaces. Large windows and high ceilings let

antique dealers stack merchandise, and cellars and second floors provide inexpensive, on-site storage. The alley behind the Main Street business blocks offers direct access to the rear of the store, and the explorer quickly discovers as much activity behind the stores as on the sidewalks and steps in front. Unlike the metal-shrouded mall, Main Street offers a retailer two entranceways, one for buyers and one for sellers, and moreover enables buyers to move bulky items through the rear of the store directly into cars and pickup trucks. Once free of using the front entrance as shipping portal too, antique dealers immediately dress up their front windows and doors and doorsteps, sometimes spilling their goods onto sidewalks and giving Main Street the long-lost festive air of 1950s midsummer sidewalk sales.

A few antique shops newly located on Main Street are enough to begin attracting the antiquing crowd, the immense cohort of Americans fascinated with old things and very often willing to pay high sums for them, perhaps to furnish their homes in residential enclaves. Wherever antique shops blossom along Main Street, wherever the antique dealers hang out flags, repaint facades, and set ancient sleds and chairs on the sidewalk, there the explorer knows that good restaurants have also opened. Art galleries and bookshops, especially secondhand bookshops, follow

the arrival of antique stores and one or two new restaurants. Like the antique dealers, the art gallery owners prize the large windows and high ceilings of the old stores, but perhaps their understanding that certain types of paintings sell well to people already owning ornate frames does as much to encourage their relocation to small towns. Booksellers value the large stores and high ceilings too, of course, but they know that antique collectors not only read but are likely to read old books, and sometimes are looking to buy sets of great authors to make their newly acquired golden-oak bookcases look right.

In the middle 1980s, antique-dealer associations had begun distributing maps showing the location of antique-dealer clusters, but at the end of the 1990s, the explorer finds the brochures in state-line tourist-information kiosks touting scenic tours not only for antique collectors but for buyers of new paintings and used books. Always the brochures direct motorists, and determined bicyclists, toward a route punctuated with renovated main streets.

A sort of clerisy now shops away from the commercial strips and regional malls and factory outlet clusters that at first glance seem to draw all the retail business of the country. The clerisy has time to shop, often devoting a weekend to a leisurely shopping trip miles from home. It is a group as yet unmarked by

news media dependent on shopping mall advertising, but it assuredly threatens the owners of upscale shopping malls already worried that many two-income couples buy most of their clothing from mail-order firms and are bored beyond measure with mall shopping. Retail analysts know what the explorer knows. In the boutiqued main-street shops, the stock is wholly unpredictable and continuously changing, not only enticing the young couple furnishing a first condo, but inveigling the retired couple intrigued with collecting period signboards. A good antique shop, a good secondhand bookstore, offers variety and serendipitous experience—or at least the *chance* of a serendipitous experience—no mall can begin to match. And a first-rate Main Street pulsing with specialized shops becomes a place a family, even a family with young teenagers, can visit happily.

Walking or pedaling very slowly through the crowds on a weekend main street, or stopped eating ice cream, leaning against a brick wall warm in the sun, the explorer looks above storefront level and sees the signs of old fraternal orders, whose meeting rooms cover entire second stories of small-town buildings. International Order of Odd Fellows, the Red Men, the Benevolent and Fraternal Order of Elks, the Masons—all more or less descend from the mid-nineteenth-century loneliness and anxiety of

small-town men traveling on business and anxious for some sort of brotherhood support in towns and cities far from home. To be sure, the older orders and the newer ones like the Kiwanis and Rotary and Lions exist mostly to do good, the Masons raising thousands of dollars a day nationwide to operate fee-free hospitals for burned and crippled children, the Rotary giving scholarships for foreign travel and study, the Lions funding vision research and testing. But they still speak strongest to small-town men searching for some sort of fellowship beyond the satellite dish, some focus on something better than everyday money-getting perhaps.

For all that urban people see them as hokey, and for all that urban people know almost nothing about them anyway, the explorer trying to realize—to *make real*—a small town sees the metal signs with the cryptic logos and knows that fraternal orders still matter to small-town men. How they matter, the explorer cannot quite decide, but the signs ranged outside towns, the signs sometimes clustered on a metal frame adjacent to secondary highways, almost always have smaller signs beneath explaining that the Masons meet every third Thursday evening at 7:00 P.M. in the Masonic Hall, that the Kiwanis chapter meets every third Wednesday for lunch at a restaurant on the bypass. And the signs are rarely rusted, never van-

dalized, almost invariably glistening in their porcelain-enamel finish. They speak to the explorer of a web of small-town connections reaching from Maine to California, a web not on-line. They speak of instantaneous acceptance, of an immediate meal, probably free, for members, of men still intrigued in civic duty, charity, morality-based self-improvement efforts.

The explorer stopped to rest on Main Street or a few miles away by the metal frame carrying the fraternal-order signs aimed at motorists approaching Main Street sees something else, the overhead wires that hint at fiber-optic connections, the miniature satellite dishes that suggest that small-town businesses are linking up electronically, that the bypass businesses may be bypassed soon.

Often the fraternal-order signs announce lunch at a Holiday Inn, Best Western, or other motel restaurant out on the bypass circling around Main Street, around the whole town. The bicyclist-explorer riding long back-road distances, from one small town to another to another, discovers in the pattern of edge-of-town fraternal-order signs something of the lingering rents in small-town, main-street fabric. Most small towns offer no room for the night, at least not near Main Street, not even a bed-and-breakfast in a big, well-porched house a block or so away on

Maple Street. At best they offer a sign announcing a Comfort Inn or Days Inn a few miles away, a sign sometimes decorated with fraternal-order signs implying that while Main Street might have a good diner or even a decent restaurant, it lacks any place where thirty-five or sixty Kiwanians or Rotarians can sit down, eat, and discuss the next charitable effort. Small towns still put up most visitors in homes, for the old hotel abandoned above its ground floor, or long converted to elderly housing, has accepted no guests since the demise of railroad passenger-train service in the 1950s. The explorer can visit Main Street, but almost never can the explorer stay overnight. Always he or she must walk or ride away from town, through the woods or fields, toward the main-traveled road, toward the highway, toward the interstate highway, toward the motel.