

A history of Pat and Gar's Hi-Way Bar Mural



A piece of historic public art discovered and preserved

Lafayette, Colorado's Coca-Cola mural represents one colorful stage in the long use life of the historic building formerly located at 201 N. Public Road. That building, which originally had a false front, was constructed during the first decade of the 1900s. In 1913 what is now Public Road became part of the Lincoln Highway, the country's first transcontinental automobile route. Although the Colorado portion of the Lincoln Highway was federally un-sanctioned in 1915, it remained a vital route for automobile travel, tourism, and advertising into the 1950s.

By 1926 the building at 201 N. Public Road was open as Parr's Pharmacy, owned by Emmitt L. and Louise Parr. By 1936 it had become DeTavern, operated by Daniel and Edyth Palizzi. Sometime later the building became the High-Way Restaurant. The earliest historic photo of the building, probably from the late 1930s or early 1940s, shows this name, spelled as "Hi-Way," painted as a banner across the top of the south wall of the building. Below that is a large painted advertisement for "Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer".

By 1948 the building's false front was removed, its roofline was changed, its façade was covered in stucco, and its large storefront windows were replaced by small, round windows set in the middle of large, rectangular areas of glass block. At that time the building retained its "Hi-Way Restaurant" banner but displayed a "Coors Beer" mural across its south wall. However, those were soon replaced by a new banner and mural. In 1949 or the early 1950s sign painters created a "Pat and Gar's Hi-Way Bar" banner across the top of the south wall. Below that they painted a large Coca-Cola mural with the slogan, "Drink Coca-Cola It's the Real Thing." That slogan had been introduced by Coke in the early 1940s. The Hi-Way Bar banner and Coca-Cola advertisement, collectively called the Coke mural, were relatively short-lived, as the building was covered with asbestos siding in 1956. Subsequently the building became, among other businesses, Mike's Bar, Don & Sandy's Little

Mexican Kitchen, and eventually La Familia. Although the siding hid the mural from public sight, it helped to protect the paint from fading and otherwise weathering until the south side of the building was uncovered prior to demolition in June 2015.

Over the decades between the 1890s and 1950s The Coca-Cola Company and/or its local bottlers paid for thousands of painted wall signs advertising their product. Most often local sign painters did the work. As a result, before Coke created specific guidelines for its advertising, the wall signs exhibited great variation in composition, color, style, and even spelling. To create a more uniform look, in the early 1920s Coke began to issue directives for the placement, size, lettering, preparation, and coloring of its painted wall signs. This can be seen in Lafayette's Coke mural. For example, to create the white and yellow lettering of the slogan, the painters first prepared large rect-



angles of those two colors in the appropriate places within the sign. Then they painted red over the top, leaving white and yellow exposed in the shape of the lettering. The pairing of a Coke advertisement with the name of the sponsoring business was called a "privilege sign". At first Coke strongly encouraged the use of different colors for the business name and the Coke advertisement. However, over time it relaxed that requirement, as seen by the use of similar reds for the banner and advertisement in Lafayette's mural. The color of the former is somewhat darker than the latter, possibly because it was painted over the top of the earlier black "Hi-Way Restaurant" banner. Coke wall signs typically were re-painted at least once a year. Lafayette's mural provides evidence for repainting, both of the Coke mural and underlying murals; at least 14 layers of paint from the various wall signs are visible, with little or no surface preparation completed before each layer was painted.

In order to save the mural as a piece of historic public art, in September 2015 most of the south wall of the building was framed, cut out, and moved by flat-bed truck to Lafayette's Fire Station No. 1. In February 2016 professional paint conservators, Deborah Uhl and Lisa Capano, carefully removed siding nails and clean surface dirt off the mural while it stood in the fire station. They also applied special liquid adhesive behind peeling areas so that the underlying wood and the paint became one entity, preventing paint flaking and loss. The final step was to apply layers of consolidant across the entire mural as a protective barrier against ultraviolet light, dirt, and other damage. In the future the mural will be framed and installed in a visible location on Public Road.



201 N. Public Road Timeline

Post-1905: Wood building with false front and large windows constructed at 201 N. Public Road

1926: Building housed Emmitt L. and Louise Parr's pharmacy

1936: Building housed Daniel and Edyth Palizzi's DeTavern

Post-1936: Building became the High-Way Restaurant

Late 1930s–early 1940s: “Hi-Way Restaurant” banner painted along top of south wall and “Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer” advertisement painted below

Pre-1948: Building's false front changed to sloping roof line, façade covered in stucco, and large windows replaced by small, round windows in glass block

1945: “Coors Beer” advertisement painted below “Hi-Way Restaurant” banner

1940s–1950s: Building housed Pat, Gar, and Ida Wright's Hi-Way Bar and Café

1949 or early 1950s: “Pat and Gar's Hi-Way Bar” and Coca-Cola advertisement painted on top of previous banner and Coors advertisement

1956: Building covered with asbestos siding

Historic research and information provided by Rebecca Schwendler, Ph. D. Cover photo with motorcycle by Gerry Morrell.



For additional information, updates, and photos, visit
www.cityoflafayette.com/Mural