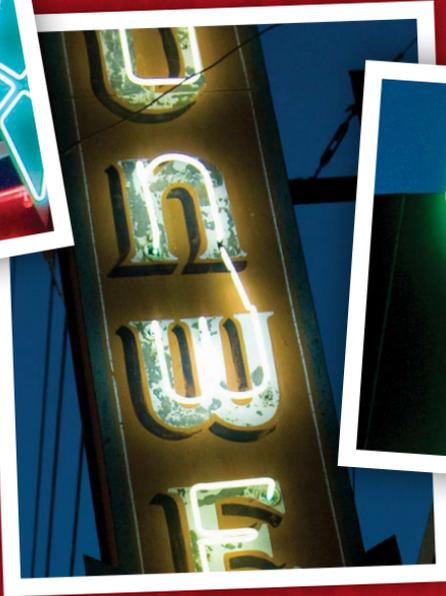


## VINTAGE TULSA

# *neon signs*

A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE NEON TREASURES  
AWARD-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHY BY RALPH COLE





## take the tour ...

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The Tulsa Foundation for Architecture (TFA) was awarded a Preservation Services Fund grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Ruth and Allen Mayo Fund for Historic Preservation in Oklahoma to conduct a survey of Tulsa's neon signs. At the time of completion, we surveyed 259 signs with relevant details including sign name, type, mount, style of lettering, history, location and neon tubing description. The boundaries for the Neon Sign Survey were 56th Street North (north); 61st Street South (south); Highway 169 (east); and Highway 75 (west).

Of the signs surveyed, some naturally rose to the top of the list for many and varied reasons. This brochure features some of our favorites. We hope you enjoy them, too.



1

8

11

412

51

244

412

E Admiral Pl. / Archer

444

75

S Quaker Ave.

S Troost Ave.

S Lewis's Ave.

S Harvard Ave.

S Yale Ave.

S Hudson Ave.

Denver Ave.

Detroit Ave.

W 6th St.

W 7th St.

Cincinnati Ave.

3

4

E 11th St.

66

E 12th St.

9

10

12

S Fulton Ave.

75

64

51

E 15th St.

244

E 18th St.

5

E 21st St.

S Utica Ave.

N Sheridan Rd.

11

13

E Reading St.

E Pine St.

169

66

E 11th St.

14

S Garnett Rd.

44

S Peoria Ave.

6

7

E 36th St.

Riverside Dr.





- 1 **Vernon A.M.E. Church** • 311 N Greenwood Ave.
- 2 **Tulsa Abstract & Title Co.** • 612 S Denver Ave.
- 3 **Meadow Gold** • E 11th St. & S Quaker Ave.
- 4 **El Rancho Grande** • 1629 E 11th St.
- 5 **Phoenix Cleaners** • 125 E 18th St.
- 6 **Dunwell Sushi** • In the Raw • 3321 S Peoria Ave.
- 7 **The Brook** • 3401 S Peoria Ave.
- 8 **Circle Cinema** • 10 S Lewis Ave.
- 9 **Moody's Jewelry** • 1137 S Harvard Ave.
- 10 **Pioneer Cleaners Laundry** • 1145 S Harvard Ave.
- 11 **Ann's Bakery** • 7 N Harvard Ave.
- 12 **Desert Hills Motel** • 5520 E 11th St.
- 13 **White River Fish Market** • 1708 N Sheridan Ave.
- 14 **Brookshire Motel** • 11017 E 11th St.

311 N GREENWOOD AVE.

1

*vernon a.m.e. church*

The only religious structure in Tulsa with a neon sign, the Vernon A.M.E. Church has a vertical sign with both flat-block, double-tube letters and flat-block, single-tube letters. There is a plaque on the bottom of the sign that reads: "In appreciation of Ms. Cora Shaw 11-95 Tulsa Neon." The sign was manufactured circa 1945.



2

612 S DENVER AVE.

## *tulsa abstract & title co.*

Claude Neon Federal Sign Company built this billboard-style roof sign in 1955. The sign features flat-block, single-tube letters, a neon arrow and neon outline. The sign is in its original location and is fully operational.





## *meadow gold*

This large, open roof-style sign was built circa 1939 and was originally located on the southwest corner of 11th and Lewis. In 2004, the Tulsa Foundation for Architecture was awarded a National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program grant to restore the sign. A change of ownership and subsequent demolition of the building on which the sign stood for 65 years rallied Tulsans and Route 66 enthusiasts across the country to save the historic landmark sign. A support pavilion was erected and the signs, restored by Claude Neon Federal Sign Company, feature both flat-block, double-tube letters and flat-block, single tube letters. The neon clocks on both sides of the sign have been replicated and installed at a later date.

## *el rancho grande*

Originally located downtown at 6th & Boulder, this sign was manufactured in 1950 and moved to its present location in 1953. The building that houses the current restaurant housed a grocery store in 1924, and later a paint store in 1928. Located on Route 66, this projection sign has flat-script, single-tube letters, flat-block, single-tube letters, and a neon “matador.” The arrow on top of the neon sign is a generic addition to the original sign.



## *phoenix cleaners*

Phoenix Cleaners has been a Tulsa business since the 1930s and was originally located at 407 N Main St., although it was not yet named Phoenix Cleaners. When the first store burned to the ground in 1942, the owners opened their business at 123 E 18th St. and renamed it “Phoenix Cleaners” as it had, like the fabled bird, literally risen from the ashes. The current owner’s great uncle designed the marquee sign and the Wally Werr Sign Co. built the sign with flat-block, single-tube letters. A Sand Springs company porcelainized the sign. In 1948, the business and the sign moved one door east to their current location at 125 E 18th St. The sign is operational and has not been altered, although it has been restored. The owners had some problems with the paper delivery boy, who on several occasions broke the sign’s neon tubing throwing the newspaper. The owners soon cancelled their subscription.



6

3321 S PEORIA AVE.

*dunwell sushi • in the raw*

Currently known as “In The Raw” an upscale sushi restaurant, this was originally the site of Dunwell Cleaners founded by Ralph E. Johnson and operated as a cleaners until the late 1990s. This vertical sign has flat-block, single-tube lettering and has been altered to read “Sushi” instead of “Cleaners.”



B  
R  
O  
O

*Restaurant & Bar*

**HALF PRICE WINE  
BY THE GLASS**

## *the brook*

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The Brook opened as a theater in 1949 and featured “Father Was a Fullback” starring Fred McMurray for its inaugural. The Brook was designed by architect William Henry Cameron Calderwood and features one of Tulsa’s only marquee-style signs that include channel-block, double-tube letters, channel-script, single-tube letters, and neon banding. Also of note are the glass panels in the letterbox. The Wally Werr Sign Co. manufactured the original sign.





10 S LEWIS AVE.

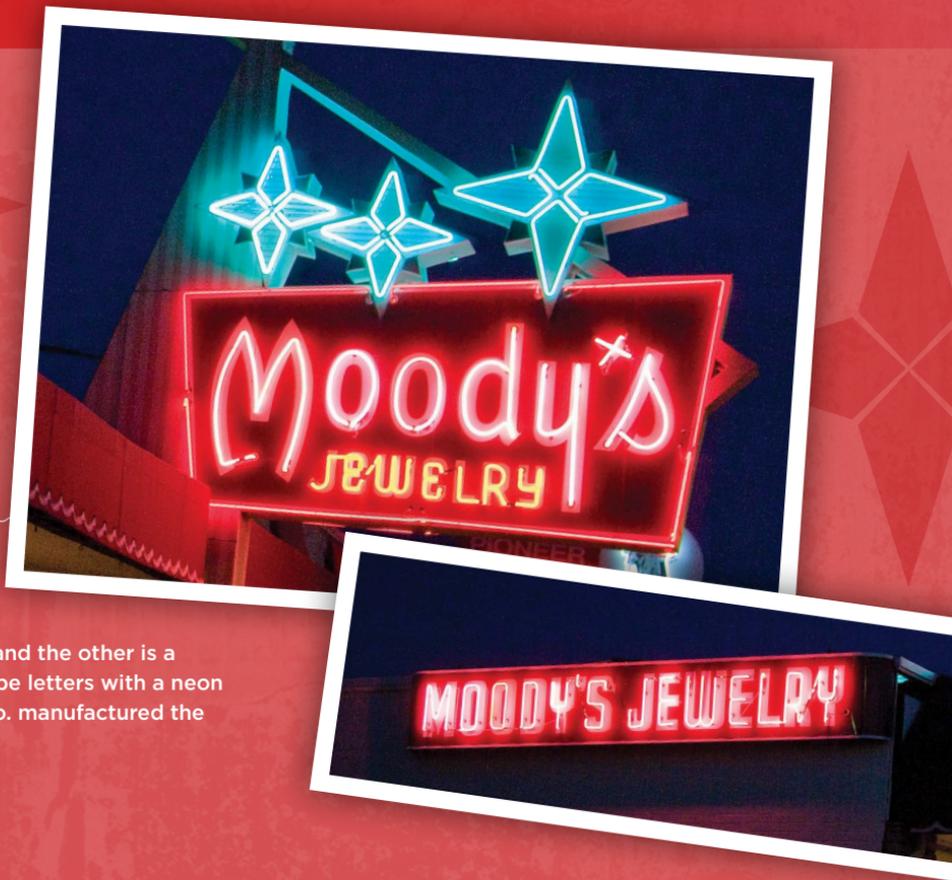
8

## *circle cinema*

Located in historic Whittier Square, the Circle Theater opened in 1928 as one of Tulsa's first suburban movie theatres. The theatre was renovated in 1963 and became the "New" Circle Theater, an adult theater, in 1978. In 2003, the Tulsa Foundation for Architecture received a Community Development Block Grant to acquire the theater and adjacent building for restoration by the Circle Cinema Foundation. The neon sign, restored in 2005 by Claude Neon Federal Sign Company, is a marquee sign with flat-block, double-tube letters with a neon outline and banding.

## *moody's jewelry*

Moody's has been a family-owned jewelry store in Tulsa since 1944. This original location features two neon signs; one is a fascia sign with flat-block, single-tube letters and the other is a pylon-style pole sign with flat-block, single-tube letters with a neon outline and neon stars. The Wally Werr Sign Co. manufactured the signs when the store opened.





*pioneer cleaners laundry*

Located near Moody's Jewelry, this pole sign features flat-block, single-tube letters and a neon "pioneer woman" inspired by the Pioneer Woman statue on the grounds of the Marland Mansion in Ponca City, Oklahoma. Due to the visible wiring on the top of the sign, it is possible that this sign may have been mounted as a projection sign originally.

## *ann's bakery*

Serving Tulsans since 1938, Ann's Bakery was Tulsa's oldest scratch bakery which closed in 2018. It had two identical fascia signs with flat-block, single-tube letters and flat-script, single-tube letters. Either Claude Neon or Wally Werr Sign Co. manufactured the signs circa 1950.

Additionally, the bakery had a different pole-mounted neon sign, circa 1946 that has since been removed.





## *desert hills motel*

Located on Route 66, this pylon-style pole sign has flat-block, double-tube letters, flat-script, single-tube letters, a neon arrow and a neon cactus. The Desert Hills is one of Tulsa's few remaining motor-court motels that were at one time very common on the Mother Road. Claude Neon Federal Sign Company manufactured this sign circa 1970.

## *white river fish market*

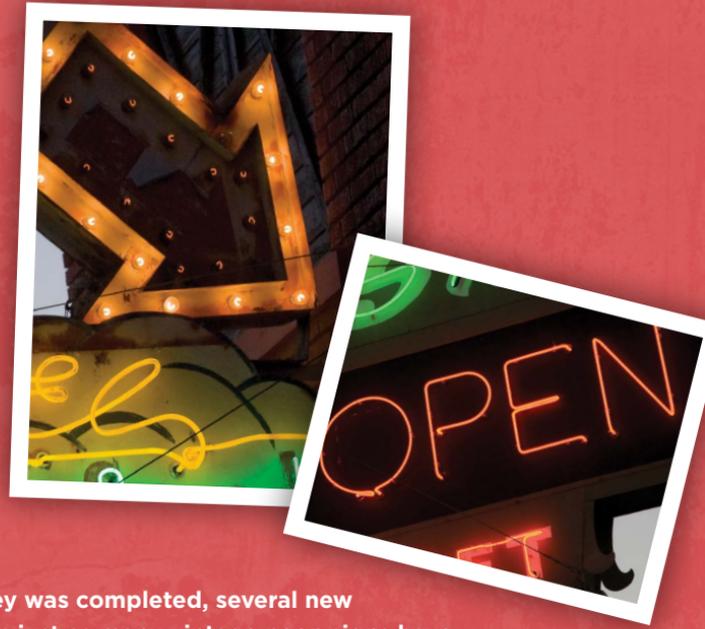
O.T. Fallis opened the White River Fish Market in 1932 and added the dine-in restaurant in 1942. Garry Cozby purchased the market and restaurant in 1981. The White River Fish Market is a Tulsa tradition and offers fresh seafood in an informal setting. The pole sign has flat-block, single-tube letters and an animated neon fish.





## *brookshire motel*

Located on Route 66, the Brookshire Motel features a pole sign that has flat-block, single-tube letters. Although only a portion of the neon remains, the original sign would have also featured flat-script, single-tube letters. The sign was manufactured circa 1950.



No comprehensive survey is ever truly finished. Since this survey was completed, several new neon signs have emerged along Tulsa's arterials. Sadly however, just as many vintage neon signs have disappeared. TFA's part in saving the historic Meadow Gold sign from demolition and the resulting restoration and relocation project continue to be an inspiration and a reminder that our existing vintage neon signs can be reborn, restored and used to tell the story of Tulsa's colorful history.



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