

Rich Perry, a critically acclaimed photographer from Lowell, MA will exhibit his series *Route 66, Oklahoma* at the Gallery of the Bedford Free Public Library from January 8 - March 11, 2015.

The public is invited to attend a reception for the artist on Friday, January 23, from 6 to 7 pm.

Please contact the library for further information [www.bedfordlibrary.net](http://www.bedfordlibrary.net).

### **About Route 66**

US Route 66, which ran from Chicago to Los Angeles, was established in 1926 linking the east coast to the west via highway. In the 1950's President Eisenhower initiated a national system of interstate highways, and as a result, Route 66 was decommissioned in 1985 after many years of hard use and service to this country.

The road spawned songs such as Booby Troup's "Route 66" which was first recorded by Nat King Cole and now by well more than 50 singers, a TV show starring Martin Milner and George Maharis which gave an abrupt boost to the sales of Corvettes, and a movie starring Henry Fonda. However, the largest impact came from John Steinbeck's Pulitzer winning novel, *Grapes of Wrath* from which the movie of the same title was made.

Steinbeck's presents the story of the Joad family's migration across Oklahoma to California during the Dust Bowl era. It captures the true history and power of that road. Steinbeck uses the road as metaphor of the struggle between the laborers and the owners, the government and the people it was supposed to protect, and avarice and greed against human compassion. It was on this road that the determination to survive and to make a better life came face to face with uncompromising barriers.

At the time of this migration, Route 66 was only nine feet wide and not yet fully paved. Old trucks and cars piled high with belongings and the family members bounced and crept along the road looking for refuge. Small stores, coffee shops, and gas stations were built along the road and small towns grew where none had been before. Now, however, tourist attractions, fast food restaurants, faux circa 1930s gas stations have crept in where much of the original small communities were, and in general the road has become a representation of the gaudy commercialism of the present day.

Rich Perry went to Oklahoma to photograph what remains of the highway and the communities that grew up along it; and photographed what life was, and in many ways still is, on the Mother Road.

