

NeonNight

Neon signs were once the calling card of virtually every diner, motel, and business that popped up along the twists and turns of America's highways and byways. With a look that at the same time was both alluring and gaudy, this modern day version of the roadside sign reached its peak during the 1950s and 1960s.

The Kern County Museum is pleased to present four restored neon signs that once decorated Kern County. It is the museum's hope this exhibit will help renew interest in Kern County's neon past.

Special Thanks To

Nancy Carter, Center Neon
Company, Inc.

John J. Ulman, John J. Ulman
Construction

Jim Calanchini, Down Hole Tool
Stabilization

Allene Stanton and Margaret
Vinson– Dye

Weeks Roses

Cooper's Nursery

The Estate of Emma M. Sims



NeonNight

at the
Kern County Museum
June 26, 2008



Entrance to the Bakersfield Inn Annex

Sign built circa 1948

The Bakersfield Inn opened on Union Avenue in Bakersfield in 1929. In 1948, the hotel expanded across Union Avenue, opening a 125-room wing on the east side of the street. This sign - barely visible in the above photo - showed travelers the entrance to the new annex. In 1949, the famous Bakersfield arch linked the main hotel with its annex.

Jim Baker Electrifier

Sign built 1946

When Raymond F. Vinson purchased Jim Baker Electrifier from Jim Baker in 1946, he had this sign built to advertise the store. The sign promoted Jim Baker Electrifier at 818 19th Street in Bakersfield until the spring of 2000.

Far East Café

Sign built circa 1942 and remodeled circa 1951

The Far East Café was a popular Chinese restaurant located on 18th Street in Bakersfield from about 1951 to 2000.

Before the Far East, the Chinese Village Café operated in the building beginning in about 1942.

The top and bottom sections of the sign were originally utilized in a sign for the Chinese Village Café. A piece 42-inches tall was added to the top section when the sign was used for the Far East Café.



Tops Market

Sign built circa 1958

Tops Market was a fixture on 7th street in Wasco beginning in the late 1950s. Pink and turquoise, popular colors for fashion and decorative arts during the late 1950s and early 1960s, were also popular colors for neon signs at this time.



History of Neon

Nikola Tesla unveiled the first neon lamp at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Building upon Tesla's and other's work, French chemist George Claude developed the "neon sign." Claude unveiled his innovation at the 1910 Paris Exposition.

Claude created the neon sign by passing a small electric current through an inert gas to produce a light within a glass tube. Through the mixing of other gases with neon, Claude was able to produce an array of color.

In 1923, under a company named Claude's Neon, Claude introduced his neon gas signs to the United States. The Packard Motor Car Company in Los Angeles purchased the first of these neon signs.

The 1920s saw the popularization of neon signs, and they began to dot the landscape, advertising everything from markets to hotels to shoe stores. The popularity of the signs peaked in the 1950s and early 1960s. By the 1970s, plastic signs with fluorescent lights began to replace the costlier neon signs.

Today, travelers have to search little-used side streets to see a piece of America's nostalgic neon past.