

SECTION C: THE DIXIE HIGHWAY IN TENNESSEE

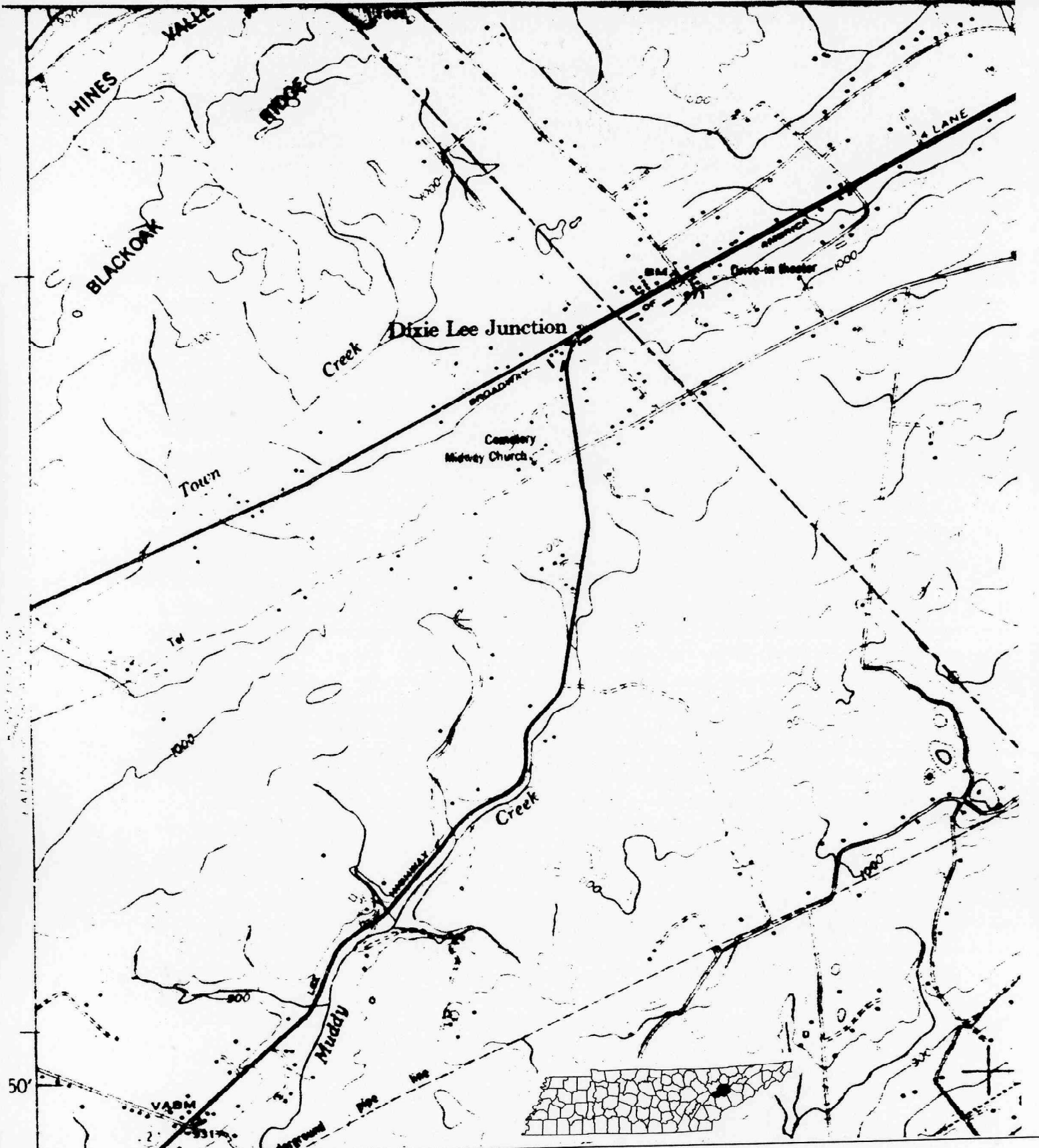
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The Eastern Division of the Dixie Highway in Tennessee ran north from Chattanooga along State Route 4 (now State Route 29, U.S. 27) through Dayton, Evensville, Spring City and Rockwood. In 1916 Harriman successfully petitioned to be added to the route. After leaving Harriman, the Dixie Highway entered Knoxville on what would later become State Route 1 (U.S. 70), a portion of which overlapped the Lee Highway. The community of Dixie Lee Junction remains near Farragut, east of Knoxville, at the wye formed by the convergence of the Lee Highway and Dixie Highway (see Figure C-1).

From Knoxville, the Dixie Highway passed through Maynardsville, Tazewell, and Cumberland Gap on then State 22 (present day State Route 33) into Corbin, Kentucky, via Middlesboro and Pineville on present day U.S. 25E (Tennessee State Route 32). However, this section was not completed expeditiously, and the Dixie Highway Association revoked the designation in May 1918. The association then designated a route from Knoxville to Corbin through Clinton, Coal Creek (later re-named Lake City), Jacksboro, Lafollette, Jellico and Williamsburg, Kentucky, on present day U.S. 25W (State Route 9).

Topographic maps from the 1940s show the Dixie Highway extending southeast on U.S. 25E (State Route 32) from Tazewell through Bean Station and Morristown and then connecting with the Carolina Division Route, but the minutes of the Dixie Highway Association do not contain a reference to this designation.

The Western Division ran north from Chattanooga on the Suck Creek Road, present day State Route 27, through Whitwell and then on present day State Route 28 to Jasper and Monteagle. An official alternate route from Chattanooga to Jasper ran along Wauhatchie Pike, present day U.S. 41 (State Route 2) **(portions on tour #2)**. From Monteagle, the route went through Cowan, Winchester, Tullahoma, and Shelbyville on present day U.S. 41A (State Route 16). It then followed present day State Route 10 (U.S. 231) into Murfreesboro and from there generally followed present day U.S. 41 through Nashville to Springfield and then north on U.S. 441 (State Route 65) into Russellville, Kentucky.



ATHENS 16 MI
 KNOX CITY 28 MI

Figure C-1

1952 U.S.G.S. Topographic map, Concord Quadrangle (138-SW), Tennessee, showing Dixie Lee Junction, an area west of Knoxville. The Dixie Highway and the Lee Highway formed the road to the east, but at this wye they split. The Dixie Highway continued west before turning south to Chattanooga. The Lee Highway turned south at this wye. Churches and businesses in this area continue to use the name, Dixie Lee.

The Carolina Division began in Knoxville and passed through Dandridge and Newport before entering North Carolina. This route seems to have followed then State Route 3, present day U.S. 25, U.S. 70, State Route 9.

Although constructing the Dixie Highway was always expensive and difficult, some sections were more difficult than others. In Tennessee, the most challenging sections were the following:

- the route between Knoxville, Tennessee, and Corbin, Kentucky on the Eastern Division,
- the route from Newport to the North Carolina state line on the Carolina Division,
- the Monteagle portion on the Eastern Division, and
- the Jasper to Chattanooga section on the Eastern Division (discussed under the **Tour # 2** section).

The route between Knoxville and Corbin, Kentucky, was one of the most contested alignments in Tennessee. The initial route followed the Wilderness Road through Cumberland Gap. In 1775 Daniel Boone cut the Wilderness Road through the only natural opening in this area of the Appalachian Mountains. By 1800 more than 200,000 westward-bound settlers and explorers had gone through the gap, making it "one of the most important routes of migration in our national history" (Folmsbee 1969:241). The road was extremely rugged, and for a short period in the 1890s, the conditions were so bad that lone travelers refused to use the Gap road and instead used a nearby railroad tunnel (Kincaid 1947:27-32). By the early 1900s, the route was a favorite place for robbers to pounce on travelers, and locals called it the "Devil's Stairway."

Beginning in 1901, "Good Road Trains" traveled through the South. During these tours, officials built short segments of comparatively high quality roads, essentially "seed" projects known as "object lesson roads." Officials hoped that these projects would generate support at a local level for the Good Roads Movement. Community leaders from the Middlesboro, Kentucky, area went to Washington D.C. and successfully petitioned that a section of the old Wilderness Road from Cumberland Gap in Tennessee to Middlesboro be included in the object lesson road program. Two engineers with the Office of Public Roads visited Cumberland Gap in 1907 and approved the inclusion of this road section as an object lesson road.

Known as the Tri-State Road, it began in Tennessee, briefly clipped the corner of Virginia, and ended in Kentucky. Construction on the two-mile long, fourteen-foot wide macadam road began in July 1907. Claiborne County, Tennessee, paid \$1,130; Bell County, Kentucky, paid \$6,315; Lee County, Virginia, paid

\$5,045; and the City of Middlesboro, paid \$2,795 toward the total cost of \$15,285 (Kincaid 1947:349-351). After completion of the road, local citizens held elaborate ceremonies in the pass on 3 October 1908. The Cumberland Gap Road was one of only eight object-lesson roads completed in 1908 when only 680 miles of paved road existed in the United States (Kincaid 1947:352).

One of the community leaders in Middlesboro was Joe F. Bosworth who had been elected to the state legislature in 1905 and who would become known as "the Father of Good Roads in Kentucky" (Kincaid 1947:352, 358). In 1908 Bosworth successfully supported a statute that allowed counties to issue bonds for road-building. Bell County and others along the Wilderness Road took advantage of this act to issue bonds that resulted in a major road-building program in southeast Kentucky. Bell County alone approved a bond issue for \$200,000 (later supplemented with an additional \$150,000) for a road from the Knox-Bell County line through Pineville and Middlesboro along the Cumberland Gap Road.

In part due to Bosworth's efforts and Middlesboro's earlier road improvements, the association routed the Eastern Division alignment from Knoxville to Corbin over the old object lesson road at Cumberland Gap. This road would later become U.S. 25E (Tennessee State Route 32). Although Bell County fulfilled its commitments to the Dixie Highway Association and built a seventeen mile macadam road, other portions of this alignment were not completed. As a result, the Dixie Highway Association revoked its designation in May 1918 (Dixie Minutes 1919:62-63, 66). The association then routed a new alignment from Knoxville to Corbin through Clinton, Lafollette, and Williamsburg along present day U.S. 25W (Tennessee State Route 9).

The directors repeatedly discussed this section at meetings of the Dixie Highway Association. In November 1924, Mr. A. P. Lerbig of Middlesboro attended a meeting of the directors in Rome, Georgia, and gave a presentation about the improved quality of the roads in the area and persuaded the association to reinstate the Cumberland Gap route on the Dixie Highway. Ultimately, the association compromised by designating the Williamsburg route as the Official Route and the Cumberland Gap route, which lies within the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, as an Official Alternate Route (Dixie Minutes 1924:160). However, a map in an official 1925 Dixie Highway Association publication, "Up and Down the Dixie Highway," highlights the Middlesboro route as being the preferred route (J. Newcomb 1925). Figure C-2 contains a photograph of the U.S. 25W route, taken about 1939.



Figure C-2: 1939 Postcard, U.S. 25E Between Williamsburg, Kentucky, and LaFollette, Tennessee. Note the concrete road.

Since 1956 the National Park Service, which administers the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, has promoted the construction of a tunnel for highway traffic and the restoration of the eighteenth century Cumberland Gap route, which is the same as the alignment of the Dixie Highway. The government authorized this project in 1976. Construction on the tunnel began in 1991 and dedication ceremonies were held 18 October 1996. The old Dixie Highway that became U.S. 25E is now probably 50 feet lower than in Boone's time, and the ten-foot roadway is now 40 feet wide. As part of this project, the National Park Service used fill from the tunnel construction to raise the roadway and narrow it to ten feet with the intention of restoring it to its eighteenth-century appearance, eradicating the modern Dixie Highway and state route associations.

In addition to the all pervasive funding issue, each state had its own difficulties in building its portion of the Dixie Highway, such as competing road interests, lack of support, swamps, or river crossings. For Tennessee, mountainous terrain was the most serious problem. The Eastern Division through Cocke County, (present day State Route 15, U.S. 25, U.S. 70), was extremely difficult to complete. The state designated this road State Route 3 in 1917, and the Dixie Highway Association designated it as the route of the Eastern Division in 1918. The Tennessee state highway department found that "the unimproved route was a steep, narrow trail, a nightmare to travel" (Johnson 1978:33).

In 1920 the Tennessee state highway department made a location survey for an improved facility. However, Cocke County voted down its match for construction costs twice, and at one point the Dixie Highway Association threatened to bypass Cocke County and route the highway through Greene County, but Cocke County finally approved its share of the funding in 1922. Construction was further delayed because the Southern Railway Company and the state could not reach an agreement over right-of-way along a section where the terrain forced the highway to parallel the railway for over a mile along the banks of the French Broad River. After a flood in 1920, the state's engineers relocated a five-mile stretch of the road in an effort to minimize future flood damage. Concurrently, the state also decided to relocate the road so that it crossed the railway once perpendicularly rather than following the railway in a parallel line. This resulted in the need for a major new bridge structure to span both the French Broad River and the Southern Railway.

In December 1922, the state let a contract for Federal Aid Project Number 23, a sixteen foot macadam road ten miles in length from near Del Rio in Cocke County to the North Carolina state line. Rather than detour a hundred miles to avoid construction activities, motorists made their own roads through the area, which were often impassable due to mud. Many of the motorists were tourists, "most of whom were accustomed to smoother country, and better roads, and these were far from bashful in their caustic criticism." That year farmers along the way "harvested the automobile crop; one even charged motorists a dollar for crossing his land" (Johnson 1978:34). The road project, which the state completed by the fall of 1924, included two small twenty-foot concrete bridges. However, Cocke County did not agree to provide its match for the French Broad River bridge until 1926, and the state did not complete the bridge until February 1928. This magnificent open spandrel concrete arch bridge remains (Figure C-3).

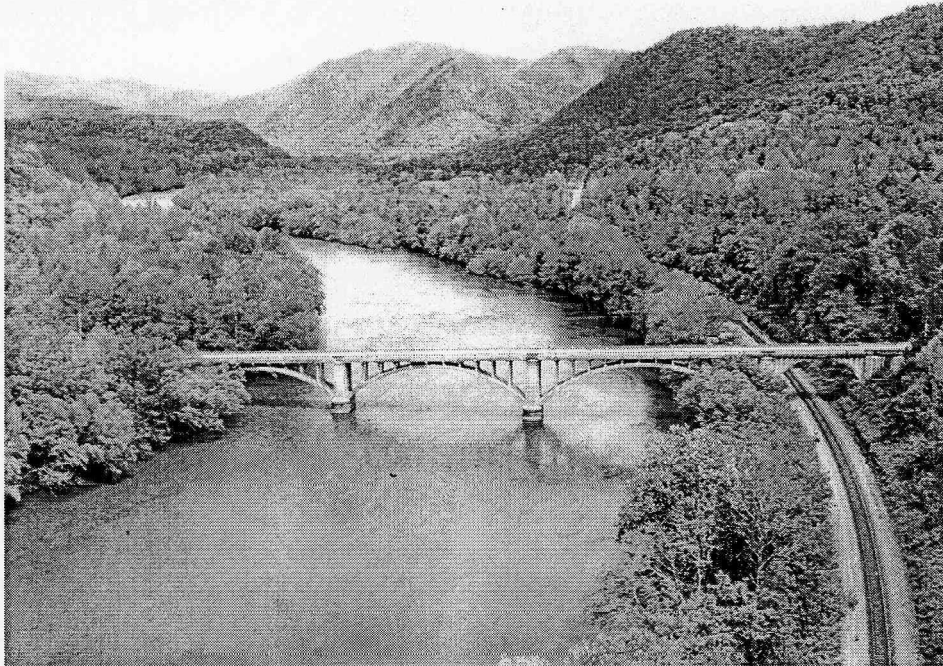


Figure C-3: 1925-1928 Wolf Creek Bridge spanning French Broad River and Southern Railway east of Newport in Cocke County, Tennessee, Dixie Highway, U.S. 25 and U.S. 70

The route between Monteagle and Jasper, which crossed the Cumberland Plateau at Monteagle Mountain, and the route between Jasper and Chattanooga, which crossed Walden's Ridge, **(on tour #2)**, were probably the two most difficult sections in Tennessee to complete. Part of the problem was that both of these sections crossed steep mountains that were primarily located on the edge of Marion County. Not only were the roads difficult and expensive to construct, but local voters perceived those sections as primarily benefiting through travelers and as having little value for local residents. Therefore, the project had limited support in Marion County which, prior to federal and state aid programs, would have had to pay all of the cost. Even later, with both the state and federal road programs offering assistance, the Dixie Highway Association had difficulty in persuading the voters of Marion County to approve matching funds.

Although an older road from Cowan provided access to Monteagle for southbound travelers (see Figure C-4), prior to the creation of the Dixie Highway, no road existed from Monteagle south to Jasper, a route that involved an extremely steep and rugged descent from Monteagle Mountain. The Dixie Highway Association chose a route south from Monteagle to Jasper that required a new road rather than the more typical overlay approach. It is unclear why the Dixie Highway Association chose this route rather than using the existing road that ran east from Monteagle to Tracy City and then south to Whitwell. A local newspaper article in 1976 stated that the Grundy County Court refused to fund improving a road project along this route and therefore lost the Dixie Highway, and as a consequence, eventually lost U.S. 41. "This one decision by the court probably did more than any other in the county's history to determine the type of place it is today..." (Matthews 1976). However, the Grundy county court minutes do not contain a specific reference to this. Another possibility is that since a route through Grundy County bypassed Jasper, the Marion County seat, the Dixie Highway Association may have deliberately chosen the Monteagle to Battle Creek route because it came through Jasper and would have thus generated more support at a local level.

The route from Monteagle to the head of Battle Creek was a distance of four and one-half miles and covered a difference in elevation of approximately 1,200 feet (*Tennessee Highways* 24 July:13). Since there were so few crossings through the mountain range, this section "made or broke" travel between Chattanooga and Nashville and was thus a pivotal component of the Western Division. In 1916 Marion County sold bonds and began road construction but soon ran out of money. In 1918 the state highway department graded the road

but rain soon washed deep ditches through the dirt lane and the Highway Department had no maintenance authority to repair it. The motorists who tried crossing the rutted, washed out path over the mountain warned their friends, and the mountain crossing became an obstacle dreaded by tourists days before they reached it (Johnson 1978:37).

Some motorists stated that their expectations were worse than the road while others had "no words with which to express their horror of such a road." One of the state's highway engineers made the 160-mile trip in nine hours and thirty minutes, which included one hour and thirty minutes for the fifteen mile section between Monteagle and Jasper. This trip, which had an average speed of eighteen miles per hour for the entire trip, was publicized in an effort to show that the route between Nashville and Chattanooga was reasonably passable (*The Dixie Highway* February 1924:20).

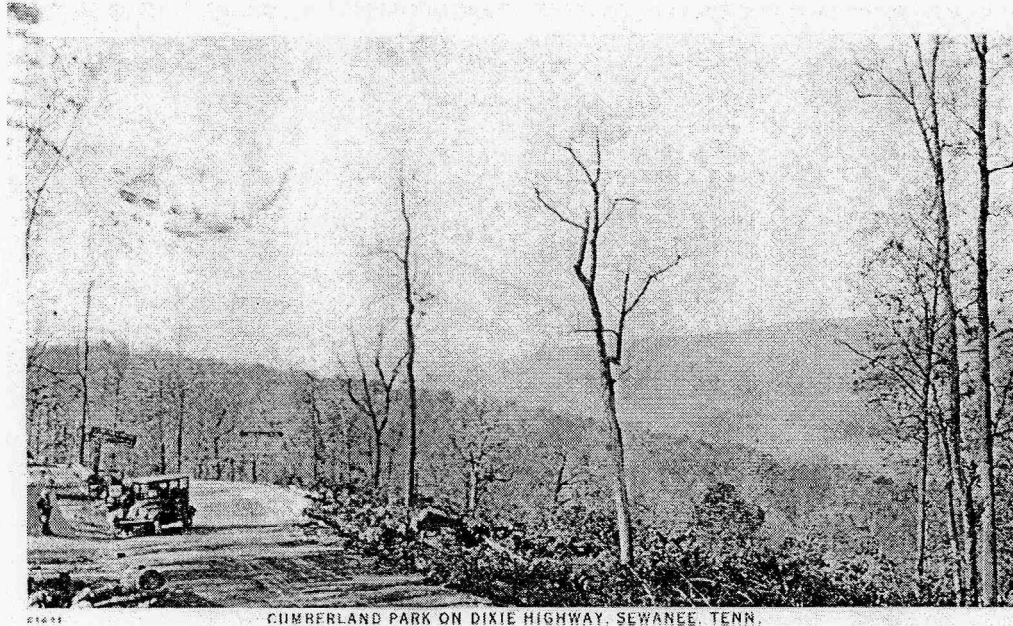


Figure C-4: Dixie Highway near Sewanee. Although the publication date of the postcard is unknown, the postmark reads 1941.

By the early 1920s, this section was the most widely known road problem in Tennessee (State of Tennessee 1923-1924:7). Even when the state assumed primary responsibility for the road, Marion County at first declined to even provide matching funds for the road, but the county finally approved a bond issue in 1923. The state finished this section by 1925 (*Tennessee Highways* June 1924:12). A special committee from the state senate inspected the finished road in 1925 and reported that it had been able to drive from Nashville to Chattanooga in only five and one-half hours. This event was so noteworthy that the WSM radio station in Nashville began to broadcast that the road was no longer "a dangerous mule trail" (Johnson 1978:38-39). Today, the east-bound route of Interstate 24 overlays the route of the Dixie Highway on the east side of the mountain, from Monteagle to Battle Creek, but motorists still view Monteagle as a difficult and dangerous crossing.

In addition to the Dixie Highway and the Lee Highway (which is discussed in Section E), by the mid-1920s, a large number of interstate highway systems existed in the South. Four of the most publicized of these routes were the Andrew Jackson Highway, the John H. Bankhead National Highway, the Jefferson Davis National Highway, and the Dixie Overland Highway (Preston 1991:61). All of these except for the Dixie Overland Highway passed through Tennessee.

[NOTE: Various sources give conflicting termini for many named highways. The *Named Highways of the United States*, published by the Travel Bureau of the American Automobile Association in 1956, is the source for most of the termini cited in this section. The markers for these routes and their alignments within Tennessee are primarily based on the National Map Company's *Map of Tennessee*, the Rand McNally *Special Auto Trails Map of Kentucky and Tennessee*, and Clason's *Green Guide to Tennessee*, all undated but circa 1920. Unless otherwise noted, all highway signs are rectangular in shape. Other maps showing routes and designations in Tennessee during the 1920s include Clason's circa 1920 *Mileage Maps of Transcontinental Trails*, the Joint Board on Interstate Highway's 1927 *Map of Tennessee Showing Interstate Routes*, and the Nashville Automobile Club's circa 1920 *Official Souvenir Map Showing Tennessee Division of Southern Appalachian Highways*.]

The Bankhead Highway from San Diego, California, to Washington, D. C., came across the Mississippi River on the 1917 Harahan Bridge and followed Lamar Avenue (later U.S. 78) southeast through Shelby County into Mississippi. The Jefferson Davis Highway crossed Tennessee through Obion, Dyer, Lauderdale, Tipton, and Shelby Counties along State Route 10 (now U.S. 51 and State Route 3), overlapping the route of the Hoosier Highway, also called the Paducah to Memphis Highway.

The Mississippi Valley Highway ran north-south from Ely, Minnesota, to Gulf Port, Mississippi, through Tennessee on the State Route 9 corridor (now U.S. 45/45E) in Weakley, Gibson, Madison, Chester, and McNairy Counties. The Mississippi River Scenic Highway ran from Winnipeg, Canada, to Fort Myers, Florida, through Shelby County and presumably crossed the Mississippi River on the Harahan Bridge. For many of these routes, Memphis was a pivotal crossing because it contained the Harahan Bridge, the only highway bridge that spanned the Mississippi River south of the mouth of the Ohio River from the completion of the bridge in 1917 until 1930. A booster publication from 1929 noted that "seven highway arteries of national importance converge at Memphis to cross the Mississippi on the Harahan Bridge...the physical link that makes Memphis the gateway for all this tourist travel" (Volunteer 1929:63).

In Middle Tennessee, the Andrew Jackson Highway marked its route with a black "J" on top of an "H" on a white background with a black band on the top and bottom. This route extended from Chicago to New Orleans and passed through Lawrence, Maury, Williamson, Davidson and Sumner Counties on the present day U.S. 41/31 (State Route 6). The north-south Magnolia Route that entered Tennessee at Clarksville and then ran south on present day State Route 13 and State Route 48 to Linden. It proceeded west on State Route 1 to Decaturville

and then south along the general corridor of State Route 69 to its intersection with U.S. 64 (State Route 15). From there, it ran to the Mississippi line along the corridor of State Route 22 by Shiloh National Military Park. This association marked its route with a white, yellow, and green sign containing a magnolia in the center and the letters "M" "G" "C" and "C" in each corner. The Dixie Bee Line shared a common alignment with the Magnolia Route through Indiana and Kentucky but separated at Clarksville and apparently ended at Nashville. This association marked its route with the blue letters "D" "B" "L" in a vertical line on a white background.

The Bee Line Highway ran from Nashville to Orlando, Florida, through Davidson, Williamson, Maury and Giles Counties on present day U.S. 31 (State Route 6, State Route 7). This association marked its route with the black letters "B" "H" in a vertical line on a yellow background with black bands at the top and bottom of the sign.

The Florida Short Route overlapped much of the Dixie Highway in Middle Tennessee before veering off in Shelbyville to proceed south along State Route 42 (present day U.S. 231 and State Route 10). The Florida Short Route marked its route with the black letters "FSR" within an orange circle.

The state designated the Memphis to Bristol Highway as State Route 1 in its first road plan, and in 1917, the State Highway Commission approved a motion that the state give the Memphis to Bristol Highway first preference in its highway program. This route was a high priority within the State Highway Department during its formative years and over the ensuing decades. In addition to the state route designation, in 1925 the state designated about two-thirds of it as U.S. 70, the major east-west route in the region. The Southern National Highway overlapped the Memphis to Bristol Highway from Memphis to Knoxville on State Route 1 and then proceeded eastward on the Carolina route of the Dixie Highway, present day State Route 9. This entire route is now U.S. 70/70S. This association marked its route with a red, white, and blue sign that contained a single star, two horizontal bars, and the letters "SNH." In the late 1920s, special interest groups sponsored the interstate Broadway of America Highway from California to New York. In Tennessee the association used the Memphis to Bristol Highway (State Route 1) from Bristol to Memphis as the route for this highway. State Route 1 remained the main east-west route through Tennessee until the completion in the 1960s of Interstate 40 that roughly parallels State Route 1 through much of the state. Even after I-40, State Route 1 continued to serve as an important local road in most counties.

In East Tennessee, the Trail of the Lonesome Pine cut through upper east Tennessee on its route from Blue Field, West Virginia, through Rogersville and Greeneville to Asheville along present day State Route 70.

In 1921 the Chattanooga Automobile Club organized the Cincinnati-Lookout Mountain Air Line Highway Association, also called the Dixie Air Line Highway. This route was one hundred miles shorter than the Western Division of the Dixie Highway, and its supporters approached the Dixie Highway Association in 1921 to request that the association designate the as part of the Dixie Highway, but the association refused (Dixie Minutes 1921:90; Chattanooga Minutes 21 September 1921). In Tennessee, the state legislature designated much of this route the Lon Foust Highway after the long-time president of the Chattanooga Automobile Club. This highway followed the corridor of present day U.S. 27 (State Route 29) through Scott, Morgan, Roane, Rhea, and Hamilton Counties overlapping the Dixie Highway from Harriman to Chattanooga. This route also crossed the 1914-1917 Market Street Bridge in Chattanooga (**on tour #2, site #7**).

The Taft Memorial Highway extended from Canada to Fort Myers, Florida. In Tennessee it ran parallel to and west of the Airline Route (U.S. 27). The Taft Highway followed the corridor of present day U.S. 127 (State Route 28) through Pickett, Fentress, Cumberland, Bledsoe, Sequatchie, and Hamilton Counties. In 1940 elaborate dedication ceremonies were held for a newly completed bridge spanning the Wolf River, adjacent to the home of national hero Alvin C. York, now a National Historic Landmark. Individuals from several states along the Taft Highway attended and gave speeches. Due to York's instrumental role in securing approval for the improvement of this corridor, Tennessee designated the Taft Highway the Alvin C. York Highway within its borders. Although neither the Airline Highway nor the Taft Highway became major regional north-south corridors (Tennessee 1929:#574), they did become significant local corridors and remain as the main north-south routes for the Cumberland Plateau.