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Robertson and Sons Garage opened in 1935, around the time this image was taken. Photo courtesy of R.J. Patel.

Dixie Highway

Famous Thoroughfare Connecting Florida to Michigan Runs Through Kennesaw

BY ANDREW J. BRAMLETT



Pendley's Service Station was located where the downtown tunnel is today. Note the outhouse and well. Photo courtesy of Mickey Bozeman.

In the 1910s, traveling by automobile was a brand-new concept for many Americans. As more people became car owners, more businesses and community leaders across the nation realized they could create a new tourism industry.

One of these leaders, Carl Graham Fisher, owned land in Miami that he planned to develop. To attract customers, he had the idea of creating a highway from the Midwest to Florida, a project he called the Dixie Highway. In 1915, the Dixie Highway Association was formed to develop this thoroughfare. Cities across the South competed to become part of the highway, and the demand resulted in an eastern route and a western route being designed. The routes merged in several places, including the stretch between Cartersville and Atlanta. Along this combined highway, the small community of Kennesaw could be found.

The Dixie Highway was not a new road; it was a joining of pre-existing roads under a single banner. In Kennesaw, the route ran down the primary street. North of downtown,

it was called Acworth Street; from downtown to present-day Pisano's, it was called Summers Street; and as it continued south, it was named Marietta Street or Marietta Road. This route, which dates back to before the Civil War, later would be renamed Main Street.

In 1915, the highway's first year, Cobb County residents were amazed. One correspondent for the Marietta Journal and Courier, identified simply as A.L.C., took a leisurely drive from Marietta to Cartersville. "The car sped out Kennesaw Avenue and up to Acworth ... the road is so good that we seemed to be sailing in a boat, and the field and orchards on each side were like moving pictures."

By 1917, however, the general opinion had changed. That year, the Kennesaw correspondent for the paper, Gipsy, and the correspondent from Lost Mountain, Allen, had a back-and-forth in the newspaper about the worst thing about the highway: mud. According to Gipsy, "the Dixie Highway is in such a deplorable fix that teams of mules have to be got to pull the cars out of the mud."

One of the problems later faced by motorists was the "dead man's curve" in Kennesaw. The curve, located near the Baptist church, had a bad reputation by 1931. Eight years later, the Dixie Motor Club installed 10 white crosses, each bearing the words "One Killed," along the curve to indicate the number of fatalities from automobile accidents at the site. According to the Feb. 14, 1939, edition of the Marietta Journal:

"[M]ore than a hundred persons have been seriously hurt in addition to the deaths. The property damage that resulted from the curve amounts to more than it would take to straighten and pave the highway to make it safe for travel. It was nothing short of stupidity in building a 'death trap' like it, and it is short of criminal to leave it where lives will continue to be lost, people and property destroyed."

Possibly in response to the outcry, the Kennesaw City Council voted

on Oct. 10, 1939, to set the citywide speed limit at 25 mph, except for the downtown area, where it was 20 mph.

As it did for many cities, the Dixie Highway brought prosperity to our community. The most notable new developments were the garages and gas stations created for traveling tourists. It is known that, in 1925, we had only one garage, as the City Council stipulated the "garage and drug store be notified to keep order in front and around your place of [business] or we will have to close your [business] on Sunday." This garage might have been the Kennesaw Garage, which was open by 1921.

Robertson and Sons Garage, owned by Fred Robertson Sr., opened in 1935 at the site currently occupied by Big Shanty Barber Shop and Vesuvio Pizzeria Napoletana. Robertson and Sons was a Sinclair gas station and sold Coca-Cola. It closed in the mid-1960s. Chandler's Service Station, a Gulf station, sat at what is now the corner of Main Street and McCollum Parkway. Pendley's Service Station was roughly where the downtown tunnel is today. It was a Texaco station that at one time had "100 Miles to Rock City" painted on its roof. Behind the building was a well that was located downstream from an outhouse! In the 1950s, Kennesaw also was home to Butler's Garage and Carruth's Service Station.

The Dixie Highway changed Kennesaw forever, but it was not to last. In the 1950s, a straightened thoroughfare called U.S. 41, or "the Four Lane," was built. Later renamed Cobb Parkway, it removed many tourists from downtown. However, the original route, now known as Old 41 Highway, still can be traced through our area.



Andrew Bramlett is vice president of the Kennesaw Historical Society and an honorary member of the Kennesaw Cemetery Preservation Commission.

