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The Life of Ke

BY ANDREW J. BRAMLETT

While countless drivers travel down Lewis Street in downtown Kennesaw each day, few realize who the road is named after. A century ago, this man was one of the most important individuals in our community.

James Glenn Lewis, who went by Glenn, was born near Lost Mountain on Jan. 24, 1874. Lewis developed a love of baseball at an early age and, according to a family history, played as much as he could when he was growing up, except on Sundays. At age 18, he began working for his uncle, Henry Roberts, at a sawmill.

Lewis moved to Kennesaw in early 1900 to become a merchant. He first worked in the Hill Building at what is now the corner of Main Street and J.O. Stephenson Avenue. There was some expectation that Roberts would join him, but only Lewis came to our town. When he moved here, Lewis purchased a house built in 1889 by James Stanley, and it would remain his home for the rest of his life. The house still stands on Dallas Street, in the Park at Main development.

Within a year of coming to Kennesaw, Lewis married Simmie Eidson, who, according to the Jan. 31, 1901, issue of the Marietta Journal, was “one of our prettiest young ladies and possessed with all the accomplishments that make women lovely.” Around this same time, Lewis became involved with the local Masonic Lodge.

In 1903, Lewis started constructing a two-story brick store on the corner of present-day Main and Lewis streets. The first floor would house his mercantile store, while the second story would become the new Masonic hall. Partway through construction, the decision was made to add another floor to the store, creating the current three-story structure. The building was completed in 1904. In his store, which stayed open in that same location until 1921, Lewis sold everything from dry goods to underwear. A 1913 store catalog is now in the collection of the Kennesaw State University Archives.

In 1908, Lewis built a cotton gin across the railroad tracks, and it became a hub for local farmers. In the basement of the building was a generator that provided electric power to area homes. In an accident at the gin, Lewis lost his right hand after already having his left hand permanently damaged by an earlier sawmill mishap. The cotton gin burned to the ground in 1943 but was rebuilt by Lewis. Eventually purchased by Steve Frey, the gin was later donated to the city of Kennesaw to become the home of The General. That building still houses the locomotive, but the museum has been expanded significantly.



Glenn Lewis was one of the most important people in Kennesaw a century ago. Photo courtesy of Rick Kienel.



Lewis, back row, second from right, with his Kennesaw baseball teammates. Photo courtesy of the Bramlett Family Collection.

Kennesaw Tycoon Glenn Lewis



Lewis owned a general store in downtown Kennesaw from 1904 until 1921. Photo courtesy of Rachael Shelton.

The same year Lewis built his cotton gin, he became involved with the Bank of Kennesaw as its vice president. The bank went through some difficulty in its early years and was re-formed in 1910 as the Kennesaw State Bank. Lewis was involved with this enterprise as well. The bank was located next to Lewis' store, and his daughter Mildred was the bank's final president when it closed in 1951.

In 1907, Lewis was elected mayor of Kennesaw. He served until 1910, was reelected for a one-year term in 1915 and served again from 1926-29. Despite his long service as mayor, there is no record of him serving as a member of the City Council.

As the automobile gained traction, Lewis partnered with D.P. Butler to start a Ford dealership. An ad in the May 24, 1912 issue of the Marietta Journal and Courier encouraged the consumer to "Ford-i-fy' yourself against excessive automobile expense" and includes prices for the Model T, with the cheapest being a two-passenger version for \$590. Adjusted for inflation, this would be around \$20,000 today.

After several years, Lewis parted ways with Butler and the Ford brand and became involved with an Atlanta

firm called the Southern Saxon Co. that sold Saxon and Chandler vehicles. By 1917, he had become president of the company. Lewis had dealerships in Rome and Birmingham, Alabama.

Though he grew up in a religious household, Lewis did not join a Kennesaw church until around 1940. The pastor of the Methodist church at the time, Charles Allen, was an excellent checkers player and, according to the Lewis family history, used this skill to convince Lewis to join his church.

The Great Depression forced Lewis into debt, and he refocused his business efforts on Kennesaw. In 1931, he sold his building downtown and was able to pay off all his debts. He suffered a stroke in 1947 and was in poor health the rest of his life. James Glenn Lewis died on Oct. 21, 1950.



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