

# **The Dixie Highway And US 41 & US 41A**

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## **Introduction**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century history of Grundy County was heavily influenced by the Dixie Highway and its successors, US 41, US 41A and Interstate 24. To appreciate how these roads came about, it is important to appreciate the relationship of government to roads in the 1800s.

Throughout the 1800s and in Tennessee up until the 1920s, most all roads were viewed as a local affair. As such, the roads were the responsibility of the individual counties and even the individual communities within a county. Tennessee required that each able-bodied man with a team (horses or mules) give 5 days per year to local roadwork. <sup>1</sup>

The following provide excellent insight into how roads were maintained in Grundy County in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In 1897, as it had been for a number of years, the county was divided into districts and a “Road Commissioner” appointed for each district. James E. “Jim” Scruggs served District 4 - roads north of Beersheba Springs. This consisted in the Beersheba to McMinnville Road, which was divided into 3 sections: Hill’s Mill Road (Hill Road forming the northeastern county boundary.), Walker Road (Philadelphia Church to Northcutt’s Cove Road), Middle Point Road (Gross’s Cove to Beersheba), Grassy Ridge Road (Stone Door Gulf to Beersheba), and the Peak Mountain Road (Old Stage Road).<sup>2</sup>

Each of the above sections had an appointed overseer and a group of local men assigned to work the road. Each road section was provided with 5 to 10 shovels and picks as the only tools for maintenance. For the year of 1897, a total of \$148.77 was paid for labor, material, and equipment on the above roads.<sup>3</sup>

As a state, Tennessee had attempted to aggressively promote roads and road building as early as the 1830s by using a State Bank to provide financing for local and regional roads. This program had ended by the 1840s, and it would be the late 1800s before the State became heavily involved in road building again. <sup>4</sup> In the 1800s most inter-county roads were privately chartered turnpikes, with county roads falling under the jurisdiction of the local county court. It was 1916 before the Federal Road Act, which provided limited funding at the federal level, was passed.

## **The Dixie Highway**

In the early 1900s, the automobile brought rapid change to America. In 1901 Ransom E. Olds produced 425 cars in Olds' first year of operation. In 1908, Henry Ford introduced the Model T and produced 10,660 vehicles that year. In six short years Ford introduced the moving assembly line, and production rose to 300,000 cars in 1913. The price of the Model T dropped every year for the next 14 years.<sup>5</sup> American had transportation for the masses!

While the American motorist wanted to travel, good, or at least better, roads were needed. Northern businessmen, who had invested in Florida real estate, envisioned a future for southern tourism, if suitable better roads could be developed. Southern businessmen and farmers viewed roads as essential to economic development and prosperity. In November 1914 at the annual meeting of the American Road Congress, William Gilbreath of Indianapolis introduced the idea of constructing a north-south interstate highway. Over the next several months he travel extensively promoting this idea.<sup>6</sup>

On April 3, 1915, at a meeting in Chattanooga, the Dixie Highway Association was formed with seven states participating. Other states joined soon thereafter.<sup>7</sup>

The initial proposal was for a single road that in Tennessee would have been routed Nashville, Murfreesboro, Manchester, Pelham, Wonder Cave, Monteagle, Tracy City, Sequatchie, and Jasper, crossing the Tennessee at Rankin Ferry [site of current US 64 bridge across Nickajack at Hale Town] and on to Chattanooga. This was documented in a special supplement distributed to the press and published just prior to the meeting in Chattanooga.<sup>8</sup>

Initially it was proposed that R. M. Payne's Toll Road would be utilized as the Monteagle/Pelham section and automobiles would be charged \$1.00 for passage between Wonder Cave and Monteagle. Later Payne offered to donate the road if the highway would use the route through Grundy County.

A month later, May 20, 1915, plans changed and the concept of the Dixie Highway was expanded to two Division, Eastern and Western. In Tennessee the Eastern Route would be through Knoxville and Ashville, North Carolina, with the Western Route being through Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta. What can be referred to as the Dixie Highway System was born.

At the same May meeting the final route through Tennessee was set as Nashville, Murfreesboro, Shelbyville, Tullahoma, Winchester, Cowan, Sewanee, Monteagle, Jasper, Whitwell, then across Walden's Ridge to Chattanooga. <sup>9</sup> Grundy County had been bypassed.

Prior to the May meeting and final route selection, Tennessee's Governor Rye had appointed Col. Shook from Grundy County and a Mr. Allison representing Marion County to determine the best route. Mr. Allison, being from South Pittsburg, wanted the road routed along Battle Creek and near South Pittsburg. He took the position that Marion County would not contribute to the building of the road unless it was routed down Battle Creek then up the valley to Whitwell and across Walden's Ridge. <sup>10</sup> Faced with losing the road to a Huntsville alternative, apparently Grundy accepted Marion County's proposal.

There was high drama playing out on the east side of Marion County as well. C. S. James, President of the Association, Chattanooga business man, and developer of a resort hotel and golf course on Signal Mountain, decided that the road should be routed from Whitwell across Signal Mountain – much to his personal advantage. The Association, instead, chose to route the highway along Suck Creek Road, bypassing Signal Mountain. Mr. James promptly resigned and started a movement to build the "James Road".<sup>11</sup>

The Association intended for the project to move forward at a rapid pace; however, apparently, Marion County was slow to respond, or at least slow to develop a plan for the road. As a result, a month later, on June 14, 1915, the Dixie Highway Association assigned an engineer to the field to develop an alternate route through Sequatchie and Grundy Counties, bypassing Marion completely.<sup>12</sup> [Probably a route similar to the present State Route 111].

Marion County apparently got the message and responded rapidly because by late July, only one month later, the newspaper was applauding Marion County's road building efforts, especially its farmers who were donating land and labor to build the road.<sup>13</sup>

By March 1916, everything had been pledged from Nashville to Sewanee to the Marion County line. Marion County had appropriated enough to construct the road to the top of the mountain above Battle Creek. All that remained unfunded was a 5 1/2 mile stretch on top of the mountain [Monteagle segment].<sup>14</sup>

A major work day was held on May 31, 1916, with citizens from Tracy City and Sewanee joining with citizens of Monteagle to work on the Dixie Highway. <sup>15</sup> Local businesses would close on the special workdays and the Ladies Auxiliary would prepare a "dinner on the ground" for the workers.

There were delays due to funding for the portion of the highway on top of the mountain from the Franklin County line to the brow of the mountain. Citizens from Monteagle, Tracy City, and Sewanee were urged to find a way to complete the road prior to October 1, 1917, or the road might be lost.<sup>16</sup> In the summer of 1917, the Association summarized the Sewanee/ Monteagle portion of the road as follows.

*“While the mountain construction is in such shape that the old mountain detour must still be used, the entire road could be completed within three months if funds were available and labor could be procured. \$300,000 should be sufficient to put through this unfinished gap.”*<sup>17</sup>

From 1915 to 1927, when the Dixie Highway Association disbanded, nearly four thousand miles of roads along the designated route of the Dixie were upgraded. Improvements were primarily paid for by the local community or by state funding.

The highway's route is well documented in several documents including the 1923 Dixie Highway System Map, 1925 Mohawk-Hobbs Guide, 1925 Clawson Travel Guide, and 1927 Rand McNally Road Atlas.

### **Federal Government's Involvement in Road Building**

Throughout the 1800s, roads and road construction was viewed as a local affair. In 1893 the first federal agency was formed, Office of Road Management, to be an advisory body to the states. It would be 1916 before the Federal Road Act was passed to provide funding to the states. Even then the priority was placed on RFD (Rural Free Delivery) routes over long-distance roads. In the early 1920s, the federal government began to increase the role it played in interstate roads. Just as the Dixie Highway System was being essentially completed in 1926, a nationwide system of roads was identified by the federal government. Standardized black-and-white, shield-shaped signs bearing U.S. route numbers replacing "named" interstate highways like the National, the Lincoln, and the Dixie.<sup>18</sup>

In Tennessee, roads were viewed as a local responsibility until Governor Austin Peay overhauled the Department of Highways in the 1920s. When he became Governor in 1922, the state had 244 miles of paved roads, most of which were the Dixie Highway. By 1927, there were over 4,000 miles of paved roads.

## US 41

As a part of the 1926 Federal Roads Project, US 41 was proposed in 1925 and actually had signs erected in 1926. It ran from northern Michigan at Lake Superior to southern Florida. This was when State Route 2 from Chattanooga to Murfreesboro was first identified as US 41/State 2.

## US 41A

US 41 Alternative did not come into existence until the 1940s. Initially, in 1926, US 41 in Tennessee ran from Chattanooga, through Murfreesboro, Nashville, and Clarksville before continuing to Hopkinsville, KY. In 1929 US 41 north of Nashville was divided with the Clarksville route being designated US 41 W and what had been US 241 through Springfield, TN, being designated as US 41 E. US 41, Nashville to Chattanooga remained unchanged.<sup>19</sup>

In 1943 changes were made to the highway designations. US 41 E & W were eliminated and replaced by US 41 and US 41 Alternate (US 41A). North of Nashville what had been US 41 E became US 41, and what had been US 41 W became US 41A.<sup>20</sup>

By 1944, US 41A had been extended south of Nashville following State Route 11 to College Grove, then following State Route 16 through Shelbyville and Tullahoma to Winchester. US 41A followed US 64 from Winchester to Monteagle where it rejoined US 41.<sup>21</sup> US 41A was not a replacement for the Dixie Highway. In fact, it only followed a very short section of the Dixie from Shelbyville to Monteagle.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mrs. Grundy*, June 7, 1928, "Fulps Announces for State Senate"

<sup>2</sup> Commissioner's Road Books, [Grundy] County Court Clerk's Office, June, 1891 – October, 1899

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Susan Douglas Wilson, *Middle Tennessee Genealogy*, Vol. VII. No. 4. Spring 1994, 148-152

<sup>5</sup> Timeline of Automobile Achievements, National Academy of Engineering, 2014

<sup>6</sup> Pam Ecker, "The Historic Context of the Dixie Highway"

<sup>7</sup> *Grundy County Times*, Dixie Highway Supplement, April 1, 1915

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Grundy County Times*, May 27, 1915

<sup>10</sup> *Times*, June 3, 1915

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Times*, June 17, 1915

<sup>13</sup> *Times*, July 29, 1915

<sup>14</sup> *Mrs. Grundy*, March 13, 1916

<sup>15</sup> *Grundy*, May 31, 1916

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<sup>16</sup> *Grundy*, March 3, 1917

<sup>17</sup> *The Dixie Highway* 1917, vol. 3, pp. 1-7

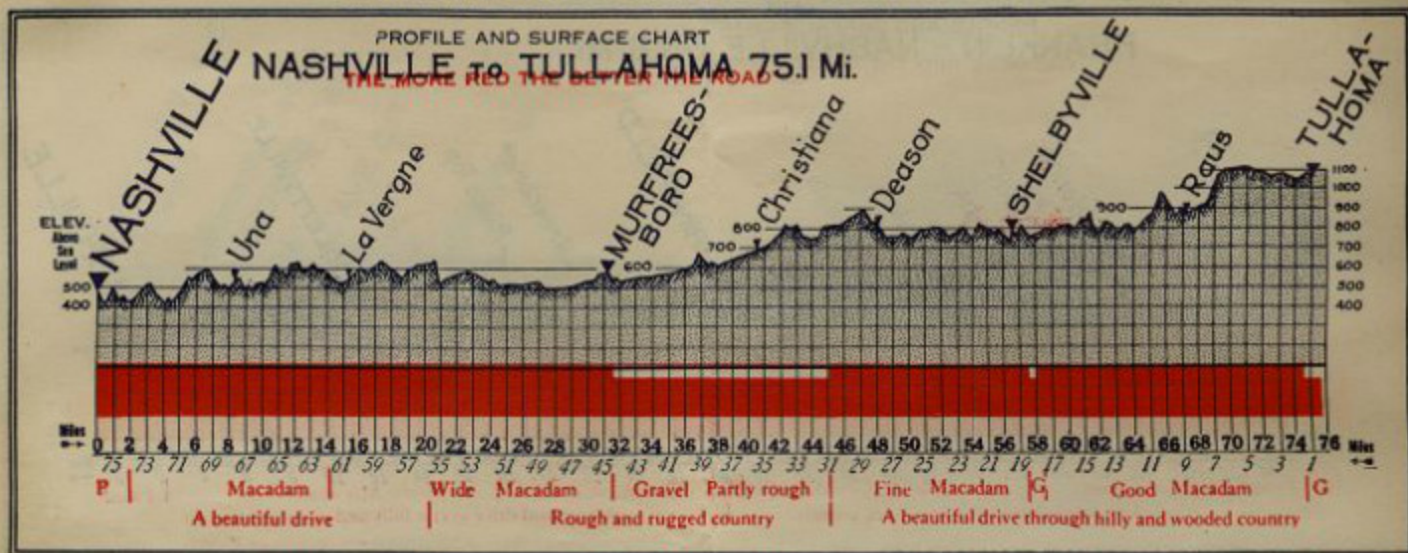
<sup>18</sup> Pam Ecker, "The Historic Context of the Dixie Highway"

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.us-highways.com/>

<sup>20</sup> American Association of State Highway Officials records

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*





0.0—75.1: **NASHVILLE, TENN.;** at Court House; pop. 160,000; the capital, and next to Memphis, the largest city in the state. Is a great manufacturing city, with large parks, fine drives and a congested business district. All around the city is a great wealth of hardwood timber and soft coal. Nashville is the leading educational center of the south. Vanderbilt University, University of Nashville, Ward-Belmont School for Girls are most prominent. Fisk University is largest southern school for colored people. Active Auto Club in the Hotel Hermitage. No tourist camp.

**HOTEL HERMITAGE** (\*\*\*), is the finest and largest; single \$2.50-\$5, double \$4-\$7; lunch 75c, dinner \$1.25.

**HOTEL SAVOY** (\*\*), is liked by tourists; quiet and central; probably the best at moderate rates; single \$1.50-\$3; double \$3, with bath \$4-\$5.

**THE PAGE GARAGE**, Ben L. Northern, Mgr., 5th Ave. near Commerce; very central and one of the best for repairs, storage and 24 hr. wrecker service; labor \$1.25; storage 50c; phone Main 4607.



**J. T. BLAIR CO.**, 517 Commerce St., **Mohawk dealer**, is very central; fine and large stock of tires and accessories; battery service; quick tube vulcanizing; makers of a noted cold patch; phone Main 1795 for road service.

**GEO. COLE MOTOR CO.** (□), Ford Agency and exclusive Lincoln service; largest and best, and gives day and night mechanical and tow car service; phone Main 2414.

**NOTE:** Going south, starting from Court House, go south 1.1 miles on 2nd St. and turn left with the Dixie Highway onto Lafayette St.

4.3—70.8: Free camp at barbecue stand (W-C-L), grass.

6.1—69.0: Estate of Col. E. W. Cole, former president of the N. C. & St. L. R. R.

7.0—68.1: Central State Hospital for the Insane.

11.1—64.0: Camping space fork in road.

15.4—59.7: **LA VERGNE, TENN.;** pop. 300; rooms, meals and garage. Camping space at church.

20.5—54.6: **SMYRNA JUNCTION;** Davis Garage only.

22.5—52.6: First cotton field seen going south.

27.8—47.3: **U. S. NATIONAL CEMETERY;** 4,200 Union soldiers buried here, most of them having fallen in the 3-day battle of Stone's River, fought just north of Murfreesboro. The Confederates under Bragg were driven back; Rosecrans was the Union leader.

31.2—43.9: **MURFREESBORO, TENN.;** pop. 6,000; leading red cedar market of the world, most of it used in the manufacture of pencils coming from here. Cedar is exported to Europe and the Orient. A manufacturing center for cedar buckets, chests, furniture, etc.

**HAYNES HOTEL** (\*), is best for tourists; hall baths and running water; Amer. plan \$3-\$3.50, room and breakfast \$1.50 a person; lunch and dinner 75c.

**BYRN-REAGOR MOTOR CO.** (□), is largest and have best mechanics; Buick and Chevrolet Agency; labor \$1; phone 28 for 24 hr. road service.

34.9—40.3: Camp at farmhouse (W-C-L).

36.2—38.9: Camp, 25c, at store (W-C).

40.7—34.4: **CHRISTIANA;** a settlement; garage; camping space (W-C).

41.1—34.0: Camping space at church.

44.0—31.1: Camp at farmhouse.

48.1—27.0: **DEASON;** small settlement, store and garage; camping at store (W-F-C).

56.5—18.6: **SHELBYVILLE;** Shelby County seat; pop. 4,000; dairying and stock raising; some cotton and a number of mills and factories; open camping spaces. Get road information from Dr. Breast, in Hotel Dixie.

**HOTEL DIXIE** (\*\*), splendid and liked; Amer. plan \$3.50, with bath \$4; European plan, single \$1.25-\$1.75, double \$1-\$1.50 for each person; meals 75c.

**JACOBS AUTO CO.** (□), the best; Ford agency giving service on all cars; labor \$1 an hour; phone 481 for tow car; rate \$1 a mile one way.

63.2—11.9: Gas at store; camping at school east.

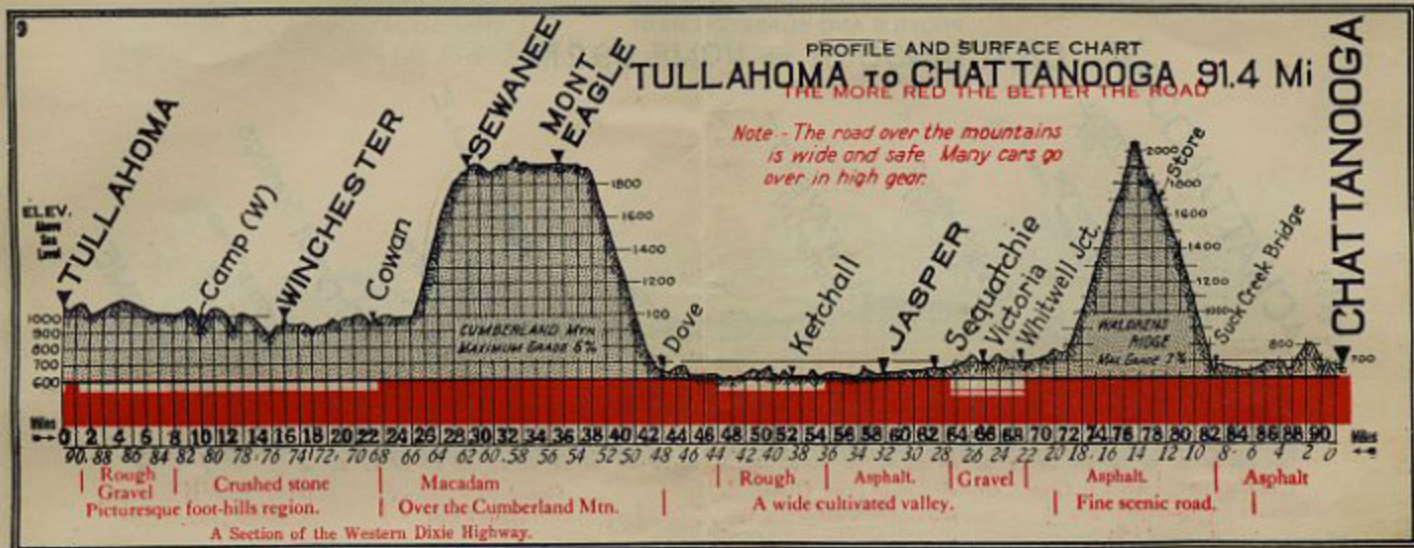
67.1—8.0: **RAUS;** small settlement; store and garage.

69.5—5.6: Camping space in woods.

75.1—0.0: **TULLAHOMA, TENN.;** pop. 4,000.

**NOTE:** Going south, turn square right away from business section; going north, left away from business section.





0.0—91.4: **TULLAHOMA, TENN.**; pop. 4,000; is sustained largely by the fine hardwood timber of the surrounding hills. One factory makes golf clubs and baseball bats. Here is a "Knights of Pythias" Industrial Home, one of the largest in the south. **Camp** at western edge of town (W).

**HOTEL KING** (\*\*), is large, modern and well managed; Amer. plan \$3.50, with bath \$4; European, double \$2.50, with bath \$3; meals 75c.

**BRODIE MOTOR CO.** (□), is best; modern Ford agency that services all cars; labor \$1; phone 105.

3.6—87.8: **Camping space** at school (W-C-S).

10.0—81.4: **Winchester Springs Camp**, 25c (W-C-T-F-S), excellent water; store and community house; rooms; good management. **Rating** 65.

16.1—75.3: **WINCHESTER, TENN.**; at P. O.; pop. 3,000; Franklin County seat; one of the largest nursery centers in the south; eight companies growing all kinds of plants, fruit and ornamental trees; **City camp** at stand pipe (W-L-C), also free **camping** on grass lot at 288 Filling Sta. (W-C-L).

**FULLER HOTEL** (\*), gives good service; hot water and steam heat in all rooms; Amer. plan \$3, with bath \$3.50; Europ. plan, sgl. \$1-\$1.50, dbl. \$2; meals 75c.

**WENGER AUTO CO.** (□), is largest and best equipped garage; acetylene welding; labor \$1 an hr.; phone 100 for tow car.

22.5—68.9: **COWAN**; pop. 1,000; a railroad town with fair country style hotel. Dixie Motor Co. is largest. Free **camp** across from Cowan Motor Co. (W-C-L).

26.7—64.7: **Cumberland Park Camp**, 25c (W-C-T-S-L), supplies, lunch; fine mountain water; gas, oils. **Rating** 60.

29.0—62.4: **SEWANEE**; pop. 700; cottage hotel, restaurant. Entire town owned by University of the South; 10,000 acres were donated to this University, an Episcopal Church institution; 300 male students. **Camping** along R. R.

**REED'S GARAGE** (□), well equipped and stocked for a small town; acetylene welding; tire and battery work; labor \$1 an hour; phone 88 for tow car.

30.4—61.0: Good open **camping space** in woods.

35.3—56.1: **Camp** in grove at old school house.

35.8—55.6: **MONT EAGLE**; pop. 800; restaurant and garage; rooms, on level plateau on top of the Cumberland Mountain, altitude 1,931 feet. Here, in July and August, is held the second largest Chautauqua in the U. S. **Log Cabin Camp**, 25c, cabins 50c, (W-C-L-T-S-F), not inspected.

**MONT EAGLE HOTEL** (\*), closed at present, reasonable rates; American plan \$3, with bath \$3.50; meals 75c.

**WONDER CAVE**, one of the great subterranean curiosities of the world; beautiful and weird; 2½ miles from Mont Eagle over a fair to good road; admission \$1.

38.0—53.4: Eastern crest **Cumberland Plateau**, top of notorious **Mont Eagle grade**; no longer a terror to motorists.

43.0—48.4: **DOVE**; farm house and small store. **Camp space**.

52.2—59.2: **KETCHALL**; a small settlement; gas at store. Good **camping space** along river at spring.

54.4—37.0: **SO. PITTSBURG JCT.**; So. Pittsburg 2½ miles south. Going south, Dixie and Lee Highway join here.

55.1—36.3: **Camping space** at school.

58.8—32.6: **JASPER, TENN.**; pop. 1,000; is the county seat of Marion Co.; is sustained by a hosiery mill and the country trade. **Camping space** next to garage.

**LANKESTER HOTEL** (\*), small, but well liked; home style; good meals; Amer. plan \$3; meals 75c.

**KELLY-WOOD GARAGE** (□), is in a new and large fire-proof building; well equipped; labor \$1; phone 52 for tow car with crane; night phone 31.

62.4—29.0: **SEQUATCHIE**; at large store; pop. 200; no lodging; small garage. Here is a large hickory handle factory. Nice **camping space** at the mysterious "blowing spring."

65.9—25.5: **VICTORIA**; gas at store; **camping space**.

68.6—22.8: **WHITWELL JCT.**; Whitwell, pop. 2,600, ¾ mi. east.

71.5—19.9: Cross roads settlement; gas and blacksmith shop.

75.5—15.9: Small **camping space**.

75.9—15.5: **Superb views** from here of the Sequatchie Valley.

76.0—15.4: Gas and lunch at store.

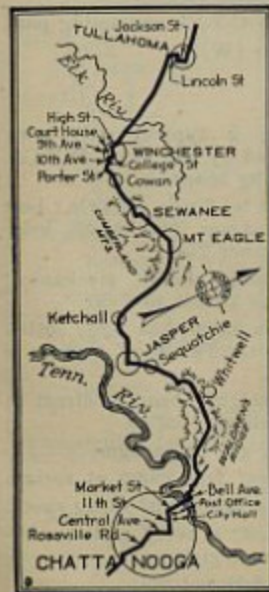
76.7—14.7: **Waldren's Ridge Summit**, elevation 2,070 ft., the highest point on the Western Dixie Highway.

78.5—12.9: Small store; lunch and free **camp** (W-L).

86.2—5.2: **Going north, turn left**; straight is to Signal Mt.

90.4—1.0: Cross the Tennessee River.

91.4—0.0: **CHATTANOOGA, TENN.**; at Hotel Patten and



On the chart, the scale used for grades or profile is 50 times greater than the distance scale