

POWER, PATRONAGE, AND PRESERVATION: FEDERAL HIGHWAY DEVELOPMENT
IN MIDDLE TENNESSEE, 1920-1980

By

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This work is dedicated to Junior Malone. You taught me to listen before I speak, love before I judge, and find beauty in the simple things of this world. Though the road curves and our paths have diverged, I will carry you with me.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses several topics relevant to transportation history in Tennessee. Through analyzing the Edsel Floyd Bridge located in Watertown, Tennessee, the history of early highway building trends, the history of the Watertown community, and the ways in which memorialization shapes landscapes are explored. Furthermore, by looking at the Austin Peay Papers located at the Tennessee State Library and Archives this thesis examines the Memphis-Bristol Highway and the systems of power and patronage that surrounded its construction during his administrations from 1923-1927. Finally, this thesis surveys U.S. 70N from Lebanon, Tennessee to Gentry in Putnam County, Tennessee and interprets this corridor in a New Deal context.

My study of the Edsel Floyd Bridge illuminates the different methods of memorialization and the forms they take on the landscape. Rather than naming a community center or a park after Edsel Floyd, the town instead chose to name the concrete arch bridge on U.S. 70 after one of their most well-known citizens. This is indicative not only of a movement to memorialize individuals or events in “useful” features in the landscape as opposed to monuments or plaques but also a way in which the community exerted their control and projected their values upon the state highway. The second chapter reveals that Austin Peay, a candidate that promised to take the politics of road building, instead propagated and utilized systems of power and patronage to build the Memphis-Bristol highway. Finally, my analysis of the resources and character of U.S. 70N reveal a complex and nuanced New Deal landscape. Features such as the Cordell Hull Bridge and the built form of U.S. 70N from Lebanon to Carthage show that while New Deal resources could provide stimulus for communities affected by their projects, they also changed the landscape and fabric of the communities they touched.

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INTRODUCTION: A DISCUSSION OF ROAD HISTORIOGRAPHY

The drums come crashing in, signaling the beginning of the song. Shortly after the electric guitar picks up, stuttering in and out, accompanied by the folksy wailing of a harmonica. It is then that the listener begins to tap their toes, nodding along as they recognize the tune, singing in step with Tom Cochrane. The song builds as it races along to the first chorus, holding the listener in suspense until it crescendos into the iconic line that propelled it to number six on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 in 1992; “Life is a highway, I wanna ride it all night long.”¹

The highway holds a special place in the hearts and minds of many Americans. Teenagers everywhere who yearn for the day that they can get behind the wheel, wielding their freshly minted licenses, and tear up the roads in a beat-up clunker or brand new car. Families plan elaborate cross country trips, jumping aboard up their R.V. or passenger vehicles, smartphone in hand, to uncover the adventure that waits around every curve or bend in the road. Movies, books, and songs all immortalize the open highway and the freedom, nostalgia, and exhilaration that it represents. Indeed, it could be argued that one cannot separate the modern American experience from the elaborate routes of concrete and dashed lines that spread like veins to every corner of the continental United States. Highway markers and traffic signs are just as much a part of us as the air that we breathe.

Yet it is this very intimacy with the highway system that breeds a sense of unfamiliarity. We take for granted the existence of the highway, only really paying attention to it when looking for a road marker or navigating detours in a construction zone. Our dependence on the highway system defines our everyday routines, lives and our national economy, yet we know little of the

¹ “Tom Cochrane: Chart History.” Billboard. <https://www.billboard.com/music/tom-cochrane/chart-history/hot-100/song/10653> (retrieved 2/27/2018).

highway's history or the resources on it. How did these highways come to be? Why did they come to be? Who decided the routes of the highway? What kind of resources are along these highways? More importantly, what can the development of the highway system and the resources along it tell us about our history?

This thesis seeks to address these questions through a case study of the early Tennessee Highway System by analyzing two highways in Middle Tennessee, the Memphis-Bristol and U.S. 70N. While the history and effects of the early twentieth century named highways, such as the Dixie Highway, and the Interstate Highway System of the 1950s and 1960s have been analyzed in some depth,² Federal highway development, especially in the New Deal era, needs more study. This thesis addresses these scholarly gaps by looking at three distinct episodes. First, an examination of the Edsel Floyd Bridge, built in 1921, located in Watertown, Tennessee. Analyzing the bridge through the lenses of material culture practice, I illustrate how this concrete arch bridge embodies the ways in which memorialization and memory shape the landscape as well as how it embodies different themes of the early Tennessee Highway System's history.³ The second chapter focuses on the systems of patronage present during the building of the Memphis-Bristol highway during Austin Peay's terms as Governor from 1923-1927. Third, I conduct a survey of buildings and structures located along U.S. 70N, a road developed during the 1930s, and provide a background of that highway's construction, history of the individual resources, and a discourse about the challenges of preserving these resources.

² A historiographical discussion on the federal highway system is included in the following pages. For more information on scholarship regarding the interstate highway system, see Owen D. Gutfreund's *20th Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Mark H. Rose's *Interstate: Highway Politics and Policy Since 1939* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2012).

³ Specifically, I analyze the history of Edsel Floyd and his relationship with the Watertown community and the history of the early good roads movement in Tennessee to show how memory and memorialization can form and shape cultural landscapes.

The research questions accompanying this project are best divided into the three parts of my thesis. I begin with the construction of the Edsel Floyd Bridge in Watertown, Tennessee to discuss the broad changes and history of the early Tennessee Highway System in Middle Tennessee. In what ways does memory affect the surrounding landscape? What can the Edsel Floyd Bridge tell us about the history of the Tennessee Highway System?

I argue that the Edsel Floyd Bridge is a physical manifestation of the relationship between the communities that the highway touched and the physical/cultural landscape of the highway itself. Much like the railroads of John Stilgoe's *Metropolitan Corridor*, the highway operated as an ecosystem of hierarchical power. Yet the agency of the communities along the highway, like Watertown, was not completely lost; just as the highway could exert its influence upon the community, the community could also exert its influence on the highway and highway builders/policy makers.

In terms of power and patronage, my research questions sprung from an observation that I made when looking at a historic map. After looking at the routes of different roads, I wondered, who decides where the roads go? It is purely an engineering decision? Some of the routes seemed to be more natural in their development, following physical features or already established routes of transportations. Other routes seemed arbitrary, making turns and detours that seemed rather inexplicable. This raises interesting questions; who decides the route of the highways? What is involved in this decision making process? Who is involved in this decision making process? How can this change the way that we view the development of the Tennessee Highway system in Middle Tennessee? By analyzing Austin Peay's papers at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, what can we learn about his involvement in the establishment of the Tennessee Highway System and the systems of power and patronage between Peay, his staff, and

the various entities, organizations, and people with which they interacted? How can these interactions reveal the decision-making processes that determined the final route of the Memphis-Bristol Highway?

I argue that the development of the Memphis-Bristol Highway from 1923-1927 under Tennessee Governor Austin Peay reveals that systems of power and patronage dominated the construction and ultimate route of the Memphis-Bristol Highway. Far from being an organic or logical process, the building of the early Tennessee Highway System hinged upon a web of relationships and systems of patronage established between highway representatives and the citizens, leaders, and companies affected by the highways. In doing so, I hope to provide a new view on road building in Tennessee, as well as a revision of the role of Austin Peay's administration in the building of the Tennessee Highways.

The preservation component began with a simpler question; what buildings and structures are located along the highway? U.S. 70N from Lebanon in Wilson County to Gentry in Putnam County provided a good sampling of resources with which to build a cultural resource guide. Constructed during the New Deal, U.S. 70N and the resources along its route provide a window with which to analyze the goals, aspirations, and changes associated with the New Deal era. After identifying the geographical area, new research questions arose: In what capacity do these resources survive? How are they currently being used? In what ways did U.S. 70N change the existing cultural landscapes? In what ways has the landscape changed since U.S. 70N came through? What can we learn from this cultural landscape about the ways the communities received, adapted, and then used U.S. 70N in their everyday lives?

When looking at the cultural resources located along U.S. 70N, I interpret them in the context of a New Deal highway connecting with an antebellum landscape. In this chapter I seek

to describe key resources, connect them with broader state and national trends, and describe the way that this landscape meshes with different connection points along its route and with existing architecture and communities. Present on U.S. 70N is a variety of roadside architecture such as motels, gas stations, and auto-repair shops. Many of these resources continue to survive in their original condition. In addition to roadside architecture, New Deal resources such as schools, community centers, and other public works projects are present along the route. In addition, I begin the chapter by looking at an example of a racialized landscape and the relationship between Jim Crow segregation and the building of the highway.

This study reflects insights and questions from a wide range of scholarship. Crucial to the writing of this book has been I.B. Holley Jr.'s *The Highway Revolution: 1895-1925: How the United States Got Out of the Mud* (2008). In this book, Holley provides a concise overview of the coming of the highways by looking at the bills, legislations, and national groups most responsible for making the good roads dream come to fruition. Furthermore, Holley acknowledges the importance of the First World War in spurring federal interest in highway building.⁴ He also addresses the methods by which highways were constructed, providing a technical overview of the difficulties faced when constructing these new roads. Rather than argue for a reinterpretation of highway construction or suggest a new theoretical framework with which to look at the highway, Holley's book instead addresses a historiographical gap in the history of highway construction and paving.

In the same vein as Holly is James J. Flink's *The Automobile Age* (1988). Whereas Holley focuses solely on the highway, Flink explores the history of transportation through the

⁴ I.B. Holley Jr., *The Highway Revolution, 1895-1925: How the United States Got Out of the Mud* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2008), 111.

development of the automobile. Using comparative history methods and situated within a social history theoretical framework, Flink argues that mass individual “automobility” brought on by the automobile age permanently transformed American society, culture, and everyday life. He also stresses the roles that the technological evolution of automobiles, tourism, marketing strategies, and socio-economic conditions played in facilitating this transformation.⁵ Despite paying close attention to the automobile, Flink largely ignores the history and development of the highway system. In his book, the primary mover for the age of transportation was the automobile with highway associations, activists, and legislation playing a secondary role in its creation.

Flink and Holley’s books are both representatives of national transportation narratives. However, the evolution and development of transportation varied largely depending on region. Howard Lawrence Preston’s *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (1991) chronicles the beginnings of the good roads movement and traces its subtle shift from emphasizing good roads for the cultural betterment of the South to economically centered interstate highways. *Dirt Roads to Dixie* captures well the heady days of early good road rhetoric, providing excerpts from citizens and good roads activists that stress better transportation as the key to uplifting the South. Preston himself gets swept up in this rhetoric, arguing that the abandonment of the good roads in favor of good highways is the reason why the South remains culturally backwards and that good highway advocates were “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”⁶ Preston goes on to argue that the good highway movement is also responsible for the complete disappearance of the traditional South. This binary thinking limits Preston’s analysis

⁵ James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1993), viii-ix.

⁶ Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 5.

and ignores the subtleties of early highway construction in the South and the agency its citizens exercised when faced with these new changes.

The first major study of road building in Tennessee dates to 1978. Leland R. Johnson's *Memphis to Bristol: A Half Century of Highway Construction A History of the Tennessee Road Builder's Association, 1928-1978* (1978) chronicles the construction of the Memphis-Bristol highway through the lenses of those that built the roads, specifically the Tennessee Road Builder's Association. Johnson describes the roles of contractors and their relationship with different political figureheads, such as Austin Peay, and the ways in which bids were obtained and carried out.⁷ The Tennessee Road Builder's Association commissioned Johnson to write the book, which takes a more favorable light to the process than evident in many of the Tennessee Governor's Papers collection at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. For instance, one crucial omission is the role of African American convict labor in the building of the Memphis-Bristol Highway.

Jeanette Keith's book *Country People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland* (1995) does much to address Preston's shortcomings on the ways in which this new world affected traditional rural communities. Focusing on the Upper Cumberland region from 1890-1925, Keith's work describes the conflicts that erupted between rural farmers and progressive entities. The farmers in Keith's study clung to keep traditional ways of life in homes were ruled by the fathers, wives engaged in backbreaking domestic work, and children were kept close to the home. These traditions clashed with progressive movements for better transportation, schools, and civic infrastructure. When such movements were forced upon them, the affected

⁷ Leland R. Johnson, *Memphis to Bristol: A Half Century of Highway Construction-A History of the Tennessee Road Builders Association*, (Nashville: Tennessee Road Builders Association, 1978), Foreward.

communities did everything they could to resist or adapt reform to their needs. The result of this fight, Keith finds, is that the Upper Cumberland “condemned” successive generations to low wage jobs and poverty.⁸ *Country People in the New South* resists the urge to paint these rural folk as being “backwards,” instead treating them with fairness and respect. This approach is no doubt the product of Jeanette Keith’s formative years spent growing up in this same region. Keith’s work, while not directly related to highway development, provides a pointed counter-example to the “triumphant” narrative of road construction and like-minded progressive programs, revealing different modes of thinking and illustrating the ranges of perception by Southern folk to the New South.

Synthesizing Keith’s and Preston’s work is Tammy Ingram’s *Dixie Highway: Road Building & the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930* (2014). Ingram’s work focuses on a portion of the Dixie Highway in Georgia to illustrate a uniquely Southern history of early highway building in the South from 1900-1930, including boosterism, racial issues, convict labor, and the ever-present battle between federal power and state rights. Ingram correctly identifies the Dixie Highway as being a relic of the early highway building days in which highway associations, like the Dixie Highway Association, spearheaded efforts to construct a viable network of roads in their respective states/region. As road building became a more centralized process controlled by the federal government and overseen by state highway organizations, these associations fell by the wayside and eventually disbanded. Ingram concludes her book by arguing that the Dixie Highway was both a forerunner to the Interstate Highway System and part of a history of attempts to privatize American highways which today lives on in

⁸ Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 209.

the form of toll roads and bridges.⁹ Ingram's weaving of the different strands of local, state, and national narratives provides a more nuanced story of road building in the South and the unique challenges it faced.

A second thread of scholarship that shapes my work are studies of Tennessee's cultural landscapes. Carrol Van West's *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes: A Traveler's Guide* (1995) provides a detailed and informative account of cultural resources across the breadth of Tennessee. Organized thematically, it offers the reader several landscapes, ranging from the interstate landscape to ones specific to major cities like Nashville and Knoxville. However, the strength of the book lies not in its identification of important resources but in its ability to place them within their appropriate historical and cultural context.¹⁰ Rather than a rote presentation of facts, this book encourages the reader to view the resources in their "natural habitat" and interpret the ways in which the resources mentioned interact within their landscapes. West's later *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape* (2001) addresses building types rather in a thematic structure, including chapters that focus on schools, housing, dams, and community buildings. It addresses roads as part of the infrastructure improvements of the New Deal and describes the ways that the New Deal changed Tennessee's landscapes.¹¹ This book identified some of the resources on my examination of U.S. 70N.

West's works also are part of a third thread of scholarship, studies on roadside architecture; motels, filling stations, cafes, drive-ins and garages. The first major study came in

⁹ Tammy Ingram, *Dixie Highway: Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 196.

¹⁰ Caroll Van West, *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes: A Traveler's Guide* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 7.

¹¹ Caroll Van West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape: A Guidebook* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), xii.

1979. Warren J. Belasco's *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (1979). used sources from newspapers, travel magazines, and other automobile-related publications to describe the rise of automobile touring and the response from different industries to this new demand. Whereas motels came to be associated with the comforts of home on the road, the original autocamps were seen as something entirely different. They were a test, a way to challenge oneself and explore the vastness of the United States. Compounded by the state of early roads, a cross country trip in automobiles and staying at autocamps would seem to be a test of one own's mettle. Belasco's overarching argument is that autocamps and motoring was a highly individualistic event and a way to escape normalcy and drudgery.

Foremost amongst roadside architecture historians is John A. Jakle and Keith Sculle. Together they have authored multiple books on roadside architecture, ways in which to analyze roadside architecture, and the effects of transportation on the surroundings landscape. Jakle and Sculle's first major work on roadside history is *The Gas Station in America* (1994). In this book, the authors' analyze the varying forms of gas station architecture located along our roadways. Critical to this book is their belief that common structures can be just as important as more "significant" structures in uncovering trends and shifts in American history or culture.¹² Jakle and Sculle found that gas stations, much like many other forms of roadside architecture, used to vary in construction and that this variance was crucial to catching a motorist's eye and differentiating themselves from the competition. This roadside architecture varied according to local culture and needs. However, this began to change when oil companies adopted common architectural forms, design, and trademarks to encourage uniformity and customer loyalty to a particular brand, which Jakle and Sculle refer to as the "place-product-packaging" method. *The*

¹² John Jakle and Keith Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

Gas Station in America, while providing a detailed analysis of a common roadside structure, also establishes a strong model and framework with which to analyze roadside architecture.

Their book *The Motel in America* (1996) takes a similar approach. Jakle and Sculle explore the history of the motel and the circumstances that resulted in the motel industry's boom that started in the late 1920's and ended in the mid 1960's. They analyze and list the physical characteristics of different motel architectural styles, providing commentary on how regional and economic needs frequently dictated the location and appearance of the motels along our highways. In addition, Jakle and Sculle discuss in detail the major motel chains, such as Holiday Inn and Best Western, and how they replaced individual "mom and pop" motels with uniformly constructed lodging centers across the United States. Much like the gas station, the desire for companies to create a "predictable" experience and the public's desire to also engage in uniform experiences spurred the decline of individuality that was once a cornerstone of motel architectural form. The authors argue that motels continued to survive in their original function longer compared to similar forms of roadside architecture like gas stations and drive-ins.¹³ *The Motel in America* is a critical reference book for analyzing both motels and roadside architecture.

Wrapping up their "gas, food, and lodging" trilogy is *Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age* (2002). Jakle and Sculle provide a history of fast food in America, focusing on early incarnations in the form of soda shops, saloons, and diners. As the automobile age begins to take off they discuss the early fast food chains and eventually credit White Castle as being the founder of the modern fast food as we know it. Finally they end with the rise of post-war mega-chains like McDonalds and Burger King. Throughout the book, Jakle and Sculle

¹³ John Jakle et al, *The Motel in America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 56.

connect the proliferation of fast food with the explosion of automobile culture, arguing that this movement changed forever the restaurant industry, food packaging methods, and the ways that Americans ate.¹⁴

The last of Jakle and Sculle's work to be discussed is *Remembering Roadside America: Preserving the Recent Past as a Landscape and Place* (2011).¹⁵ This book represents the logical evolution of Jakle and Sculle's work from analyzing architectural features and tracing the history and impact of roadside architecture to suggesting ways in which to preserve and protect said features. They convincingly argue that roads and the buildings located along them are historical places. Though these features may seem devoid of any aesthetic or uniqueness, taken together they are crucial landscapes that illuminate early American automobile culture and are worthy of protection. Because roads and their cultural resources are viewed as being commonplace, the attrition rate for these historic structures are high: why keep a concrete block gas station from the 1920's standing when you can bulldoze it for a more modern convenience store or a new housing lot?

To prevent the total destruction of American roadside resources, Jakle and Sculle suggest the construction of museums for roadside culture and architecture. In this regard they are thorough in their recommendations for the construction of the museum, including appendices, accessibility concerns, and what types of exhibits/materials that should be displayed. The authors suggest that the museums contain not only artifacts from this period but also reconstructed and

¹⁴ John Jakle and Keith Sculle, *Fast Food Restaurants in the Automobile Age* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

¹⁵ For more works by Jakle and Sculle, see *Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2004); *Signs in America's Autoage: Signatures of Landscapes and Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004) and *Motoring: The Highway Experience in America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

simulated landscapes, placing the emphasis not on preserving existing examples of roadside architecture but rather providing a place that remembers what automobile culture was like in certain time periods.

Though *Remembering Roadside America* stresses the importance of stepping back and viewing the road and the cultural resources located along it as a historic landscape, their recommendations for how best to preserve it fall short. Whereas the “gas, food, and lodging” trilogy correctly identified the importance that regionality played in the different forms that roadside architecture took, *Remembering Roadside America* seems to forget the importance that context plays when understanding roadside architecture. I would argue that it is this very context that gives roadside architecture its importance; the common architecture that Jakle and Sculle describe is not only historic but is indicative of the values, culture, and economics that surrounded it during its construction and subsequent changes over the years. Divorced from its context it loses the crucial characteristics that allow us to glimpse the historical landscape that Jakle and Sculle describe in the opening pages. Despite the surprising answer to the problems of preserving roadside architecture, *Remembering Roadside America* is a clarion call to action and serves to bring attention to this valuable part of our historic built environment.

A final nod must go to scholarship on transportation corridors Perhaps most influential on my study is John R. Stilgoe’s *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (1983). In his book, Stilgoe examines railroads and their impact on American culture and landscapes from 1880-1935. He reveals that these railroads created “metropolitan corridors,” a physical and cultural space that brought modernity and a new American character to the communities and landscapes it touched. Though these corridors exerted their dominance on the landscape around it, they were also subject to the entities that they touched. This new landscape, Stilgoe argues,

reflected a complex hierarchy of power that encompassed both the power of the railroads and the individual agency of the communities affected. This work is a landmark study because it not only describes the effects that transportation corridors had on communities but also the ability of an object, in this case the railroad, to create culture instead of the traditional culture creates object approach.

Though an increasing amount of literature is being published that describes the impact of transportation on different facets of American life, there has been no concerted effort to analyze the development of the early highway system in Middle Tennessee. The three episodes of this study, looking behind the scenes and on the ground, uncovers new questions and resources with which to better understand Tennessee and highway building.

CHAPTER I: THE EDESEL FLOYD BRIDGE: HIGHWAYS AND MEMORY

Most people pass by the sign before they even read it, the only reminder that the bridge exists being two bumps in quick procession. During the Spring, the driver might take note of swollen Round Lick Creek as it rushes underneath them, past the nearby railroad track bridge and into the heart of Watertown. More than likely the driver is focused on the increased traffic on this stretch of State Route 26, an earlier railroad route that now runs concurrently with U.S. 70, a direct result of the new Watertown High School built on the highway corridor in 2014. Even if the driver noticed the green sign that reads “Edsel Floyd Bridge,” it might not mean anything to them, and for the locals that do recognize it, the stories it has to tell remain hidden.

This concrete arch bridge, built in 1921 is located on U.S. Highway 70 in Watertown, Tennessee, a local crossroads of Neal Road and U.S. 70.¹ It also stands at the intersection of crucial themes of local, state, and national history. In these varying layers of history we find continuity and contradiction, the incredibly personal and the abstract, acceptance and tension. In this bridge we can see the history of the local community and, consequently, how Watertown wishes to project itself to those travelling through the highway corridor. Present in this projection of history is the ways in which memorialization and memory shape landscape, with this bridge being a unique case as the person it was named after was still alive at the dedication ceremony. Overarching and tying together each topic is the history of the Tennessee highway system, and even then that history is superseded by the ideas and values that the roads were/are supposed to embody.

¹ Tennessee Department of Transportation, *Tennessee Highway Bridges*, 14 April, 2014, <http://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/tdot/attachments/TennesseeHighwayBridges.pdf>.

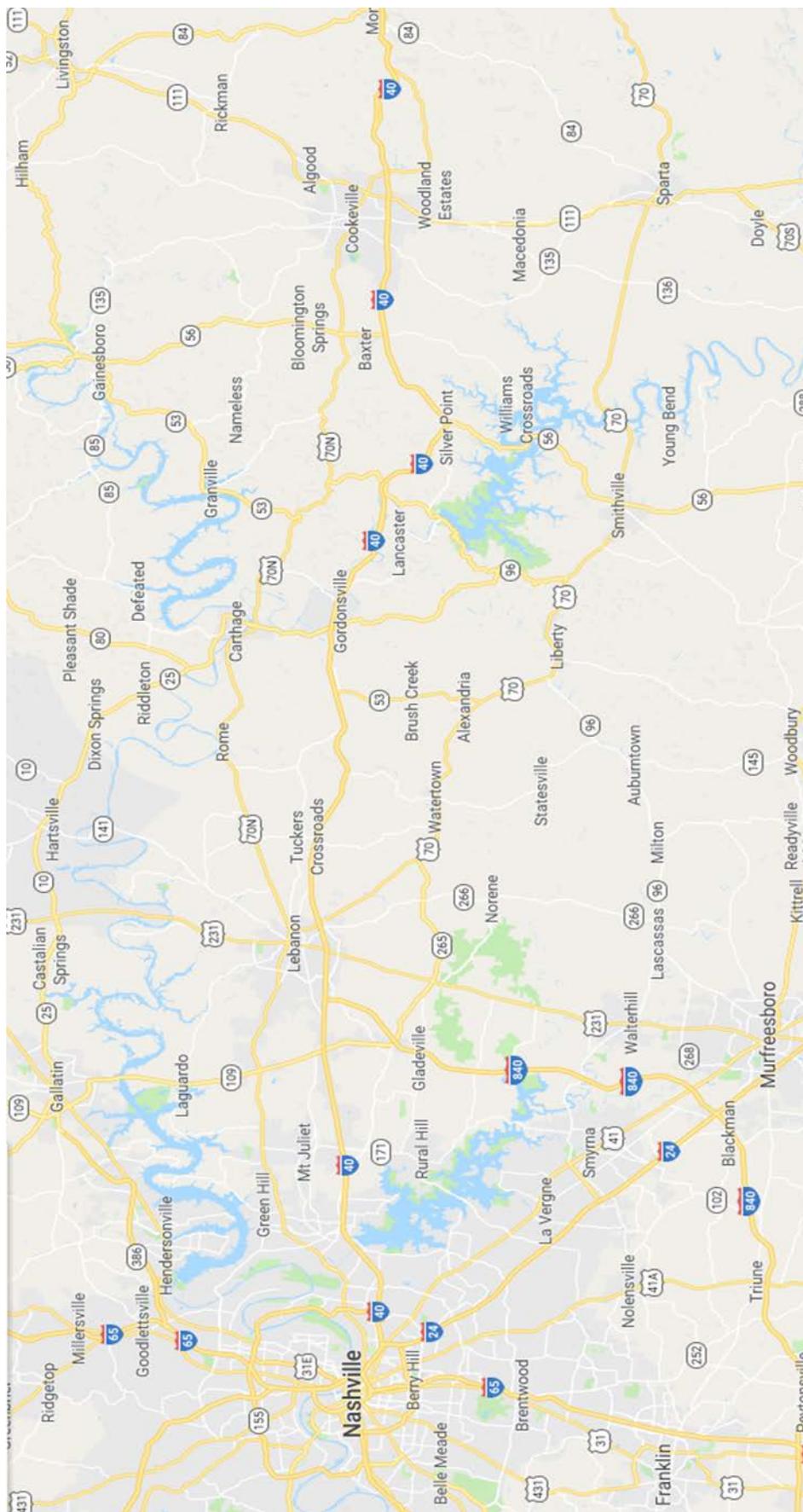


Figure 1: "View of Middle Tennessee, 2018. Google Maps.

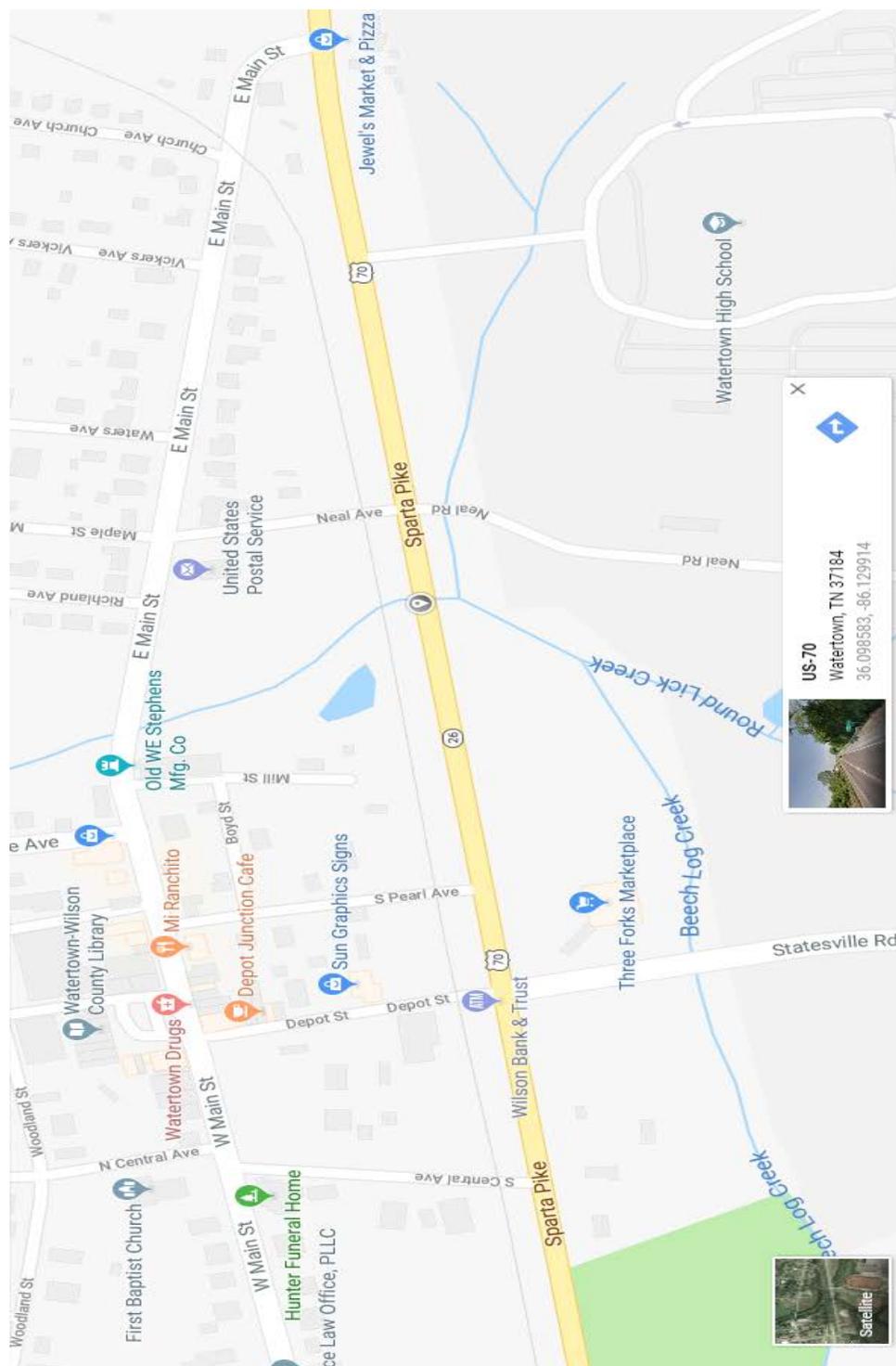


Figure 2: "Watertown." 2018. Google Maps.

Using the Edsel Floyd Bridge located in Watertown, Tennessee on U.S. Highway 70, this paper will explore the history of Edsel Floyd and the Watertown community, analyze modes of memory and memorialization on the highway corridor, and trace the influence of the Progressive movement. E. McClung Fleming and his method of material culture examination has heavily influenced the contents of this paper. In the article “Artifact Study: A Proposed Model” published in *Wintherthur Portfolio* in 1974, Fleming introduces a method by which one can examine material culture to uncover previously hidden stories. Central to his method, and indeed this paper, is the idea that “stuff” matters. This rather colloquial way says that average, everyday objects can carry just as much meaning as traditional objects of study, such as paintings or architecture. As Fleming emphasizes, “To know man we must study the things he has made—the Parthenon, the Panama Canal, Stonehenge, the computer, the Taj Mahal, the space capsule, Michelangelo’s *Pieta*, the highway cloverleaf, the Great Pyramid, Rembrandt’s self-portraits.” A simple awl can be just as instructive, and in many ways more representative, of the culture it came from as high art and architecture.²

Another significant influence on this paper comes from John R. Stilgoe’s *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene*. Stilgoe’s work examines the railroads and their sphere of influence from 1880 to 1935. In his book, Stilgoe argues that railroads created “metropolitan corridors,” both a physical and cultural space that crisscrossed the nation. It was physical in the sense that the corridors followed the railroads, cultural in the sense that wherever

² This is a reference to Janet D. Spencer’s riveting and superbly written book, *What this Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1993). Spencer utilizes Fleming’s method to make heard the silenced voices of 19th century East Dakota women in the village of Wahpeton, Minnesota. Her book has heavily influenced this paper, and where possible I seek to emulate her structure and writing style. For other books similar to Spencer’s, see Leland Ferguson’s *God’s Fields: Landscape, Religion, and Race in Moravian Wachovia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011) and Catherine W. Bishir’s *Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1770-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

the corridor went, the forces of modernity and the new character of the 20th century followed.³ With the arrival of the corridor came the accompanying buildings and depots, the “scurrying” lifestyle of the city, and the danger that accompanies the railroads. The corridor also “dominated” the landscape around it,⁴ bending mountains and rivers alike to its will. Yet, the corridor was not blind to its constituents; railroad depots and agents alike were expected to be ambassadors to the entity that housed them and versed in ways to appease them.⁵ Stilgoe uses the term “ecosystem” to describe the trackside effects of the corridor, a wholly appropriate term that suggests interaction and individual agency while also capturing the reality of hierarchy of power and influence.⁶ Most importantly, the corridor represents more than the spread of modernity and railroad culture; it represents the idea that objects can create culture and are not merely reflections of its day and age. Although the Edsel Floyd Bridge is a not a railroad bridge or part of the railroad transportation industry, Stilgoe’s work creates a frame of reference with which to analyze the effects of the Tennessee highway system.

The interaction between transportation, landscape, and culture Stilgoe writes about in *Metropolitan Corridors* also applies to studies on the impact of highways and automobiles on the rural landscape. Sandwiched between the era of dirt roads and the glamour of interstate travel and culture, the period of initial highway development is oft overlooked. By revisiting this period using archival and material culture, the gap might be filled and the story of the highways in Middle Tennessee be told more fully.

³ John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 3.

⁴ *Ibid*, 141.

⁵ *Ibid*, 198

⁶ *Ibid*, 137-8.

MR. WATERTOWN: THE BRIDGE'S NAMESAKE

Edsel Cordell Floyd stood behind the podium with Representative Stratton Bone who introduced him and House Bill 7 to the State of Tennessee House Transportation Committee on the 6 March, 2007. Floyd provided a stark contrast to Representative Bone on his right. Though he had been a slender man much of his life, health issues had further reduced his weight. Ever the unassuming man, Floyd stood with his left hand behind his back and his right hand on the podium, though to say he was not used to the public eye would be an understatement. Normally located at his house in Watertown, Floyd made a special trip to Nashville on the request of Representative Bone. The bill Bone presented to the committee was a proposal submitted by the Watertown City Council to name the bridge over Round Lick Creek on U.S. 70 in honor of Floyd. "I told him at that time that it would be necessary for him to come down here with me to get this passed," Bone said, "I couldn't do it alone and he'd read the card."⁷ Bone began listing off Floyd's accomplishments as reasons to allow the bridge to be named after him. While everyone else looked on intently, Floyd stared down at the podium.

For anyone in the audience that had never heard of or met Edsel Floyd, the honor roll of his life would have been surprising.⁸ Edsel Floyd had served in many roles encompassing multiple levels, including local and national positions. Nationally, Floyd served his country in the armed forces, entering the Army in 1949 and serving until 1950. When the Korean War began, Floyd re-enlisted in June of 1950 and served until his honorable discharge in 1952. During the war, Floyd served with the 5th Infantry Division, 30th Infantry Regiment and was in

⁷ ThePatton707, "Edsel Cordell Floyd Bridge, Watertown, TN," Filmed March, 2007, YouTube video, 9:29, Posted November, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVt0EU0b0G4>.

⁸ Even the author of this paper, who was rather intimately acquainted with Mr. Floyd, was surprised at the total number of positions he served in.

Korea for a total of four months. Military life must have suited Floyd; as soon as he was discharged from the Army he enlisted in the Navy Reserve where he accumulated fourteen years of service.⁹ His military service was very important to him, and whenever Watertown hosted its World War II re-enactments on the square he was sure to be there.

Though he served his country with distinction, Floyd's greatest contributions came at the local level. He had served the Watertown community as mayor, postmaster, lay preacher, fire chief, TDOT clerk, feed store merchant, banker and Boy Scout leader.¹⁰ A devout church goer, Edsel served as the deacon and song leader of First Baptist Church in Watertown for 40 years.¹¹ Only one recorded account of his singing is available to the public. Accompanied by only an organ, Floyd sings "The King is Coming" in the classical style.¹² To the community, he is best remembered for his role as "The Voice of the Purple Tigers." For a total of 37 years, Edsel Floyd was the announcer and commentator for the Watertown High School athletic teams, whose mascot was the purple tiger.¹³ In addition to all of the contributions he made to the community, Floyd was also an amateur historian, painter, and archaeologist. According to Chris Floyd in a "A View From the Bridge: Edsel Floyd Honored in Watertown," his arrow head collection was nationally noted and contained "some of the oldest and best-preserved arrow heads yet found in

⁹ J. Ethan Holden ed., *Military Service of Residents of the Watertown, Tennessee Community: World War I through the War on Terror* (Lebanon: Wilson County Archives, 2008), 47

¹⁰ Chris Floyd, "A View From the Bridge: Edsel Floyd Honored in Watertown," *Empire Burlesque: High Crimes and Low Comedy in the American Imperium*, Chris Floyd, 2007, Accessed 30 March 2017, <http://www.chris-floyd.com/home/articles/a-view-from-the-bridge-edsel-floyd-honored-in-watertown-21072007.html>.

¹¹ Patrick Hall, "Service held Oct. 29 for 'Mr. Watertown' Edsel C. Floyd," *The Wilson Post*, 2011, <http://wilsonpost.com/service-held-oct-29-for-mr-watertown-edsel-c-floyd-cms-78866>

¹² Cfloyd72, "A voice, a life, remembered: Edsel Floyd in Performance," Filmed 1994, YouTube video, 4:18, posted September 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvdVehI3jfE>.

¹³ Larry Moore, "Edsel Cordell Floyd," *Find a Grave*, 2001, Accessed 30 March 2017, <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=79917695>.



Figure 3: "View of the Edsel Floyd Bridge from the railroad tracks." Photo by author. 2017.



Figure 4: "View of the Edsel Floyd Bridge from Round Lick Creek." Photo by author. 2017

Tennessee.”¹⁴ An interesting and inspiring personage, Edsel Floyd was nicknamed “Mr. Watertown” in honor of all that he done for the community.

When Bone finished his introduction of Mr. Floyd to the Committee, Chairman Phillip Pinion had the opportunity to ask Floyd a few questions. Pinion asked Floyd if he thought that he deserved having a bridge named after him. Without missing a beat, Edsel said no, much to the delight and laughter of the crowd present. This was his element; he had always been known for his dry wit and deadpan humor. Further explaining his response in the negative, Floyd said that he expected the bridge would be named after him but did not deserve it. Floyd jokingly said that Bone promised him that a bridge would be built with his name on it if he donated fifty cents to his reelection campaign and expressed some surprise that the bridges over the Cumberland or Tennessee River were not named after him. Then, in a moment of seriousness, Floyd expressed the gratitude for having the bridge over Round Lick named after him; “but its better. They picked one out in Watertown. So I thought I don’t deserve it but I did expect it.” The Chairman was quick to point out that they usually name something after somebody that had already died. Floyd’ response? “Well, I was hoping this bridge would get named before they had to put the ‘Edsel C. Floyd’ memorial bridge [on it].”¹⁵ The motion carried unanimously, and the concrete arch bridge straddling Round Lick Creek on U.S. 70 was named after Watertown’s favored son.

HISTORY OF THE EARLY TENNESSEE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

The Edsel Floyd Bridge is representative of much more than one man and one community. Up until its dedication to Floyd on 22 July 2007, it had existed as an unnamed bridge on a highway that spanned the nation. These highways, much like Stilgoe’s corridors,

¹⁴ Chris Floyd, “A View From the Bridge,” 2007

¹⁵ ThePatton707, “Edsel Cordell Floyd Bridge, Watertown, TN,” Filmed March 2007

affected the communities that it came in contact with and changed the shape of them forever. Communities that the highway ran beside flourished, while those that found themselves too far from the corridor began to shrink and fade away. The building of the highway resulted in escalating tensions in the communities that were affected, as citizens tried to decide whether they needed the highway or not. Systems of patronage arose as politicians and local communities pressed for the highways to include their town/city. It is common to associate these issues as being unique to the railroads or the later interstate system. However, as local communities sought to create their place in a growing automotive nation, these same issues arose in the burgeoning Tennessee Highway System. The Progressive era saw changes in the way Tennesseans thought about themselves and their state. Progressive ideas centered around educational reform, better highways, the women's suffrage movement, and the construction of better cities. Howard Lawrence Preston in his book *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* captures the influence of Progressivist thought and patronage structures on the fledgling highway system.¹⁶

Preston identifies two major groups involved in the construction of the highway system in the South. The first group was the "good roads progressives," consisting of farmers and intellectuals who believed that better roads would be the key to reviving the "downtrodden, rural, impoverished South." This focus on cultural uplift, combined with the belief that roads and infrastructure could cure Southern backward-ness, lent an almost holy tenor to the language of the good roads movement. P.M. Ester, President of the Good Roads Association, wrote in 1923:

The country boy or girl content to live on impassable roads by that very fact proves that he or she has not the ambition to succeed in life; that there is something lacking in their makeup which, unless their natures be completely

¹⁶ Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

changed, will chain them through life to the dull, dreary, plodding of a dismally uninteresting and unprofitable existence. Such people cannot take a right view of the higher and holier things of life. They cannot vision world conditions. They cannot step beyond the narrow circle which darkens their horizons and keeps them forever held by mental and economic enslavement.¹⁷

Opposite the good roads progressives were the “highway progressives.” Though the highway progressives used much of the same rhetoric as their partner group, their intentions focused not on cultural or moral rejuvenation but on fiscal opportunities gained through courting the favor of various industries. While they may seem to be on the same side as the good roads progressives, they “had at heart the motivations of capitalists.”¹⁸

Initially, the highway system served to alleviate two major issues to members of the rural community. The first was monetary; bad roads were costing farmers money. A better road system would allow farmers to get their produce to market quickly. Secondly, good roads were viewed by the good road progressives as a way to stop the decline of the rural community. It was believed that by connecting the rural community with urban community, both sides could be rejuvenated. The farmer would be provided a way to cope with his “isolation and cultural backwardness” while the city dweller would gain a “love of rural life” through frequent visits to the countryside.¹⁹ To accomplish this, a network of local roads connecting the isolated villages and hamlets would spread across the south. With the reliability in travel ensured, this cultural transfer could begin.

Unfortunately for the good roads progressives, the highway progressives would decide the shape and structure of the new highway system. With a focus on interstate tourism and an eye

¹⁷ P.M. Ester: Baltimore Record for January 11, 1923-24, Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

¹⁸ Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South*, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

on industry, grand interstate highways were built instead of the local networks of roads that the good roads progressives desired. Preston's analysis places the responsibility of this shift on the farmers' shoulders. "By continually opposing taxation, farmers put themselves in a conservative and defensive position never changed" Preston writes.²⁰ In addition, because farmers never offered any alternatives to spending highway funds, the highway progressives were able to shore up support in favor of economic development of the South instead of the abstract good roads reform movement.²¹ Edsel Floyd Bridge, and indeed the Watertown community, owes its existence and staying power to this change of strategy. U.S. 70 was originally State Route 26, a spur road that connected Lebanon and Sparta. Meanwhile, neighboring communities like Statesville or Commerce, which are located off of the main highway, did not receive the same amount of development or attention that Watertown did. Perhaps if the good roads progressives had won power and were able to influence the direction of the highway system, communities like them would have similar staying power.

AUSTIN PEAY AND THE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

When Austin Peay took office in 1923, the Edsel Floyd Bridge would only have been two years old. In 1920, Confederate pensions received more state funds than the highways, and consequently it only had 500 miles of paved roads. The Tennessee Good Roads Association was not pleased with this statistic. They believed that without good roads, a community could not prosper. They canvassed the community in an attempt to garner support for good roads. "The progress of any country or community is dependent on good roads," they said, "And the deplorable backwardness and illiteracy which exists in some parts of the South is due almost

²⁰ Ibid, 65.

²¹ Ibid, 67.

entirely to a lack of good roads [,] which makes impossible a free exchange of ideas and produce." Despite their efforts, in April 1923, General Assembly rejected the bond issue, with rural legislators voting against it because of fear of state debt and corruption.²² The lesson's learned from Brownlow's administration were far reaching indeed.

This trend changed with Governor Peay. He proposed to the TGRA a "pay as you go" plan, funded by gasoline and vehicle registration fees and supplemented by short-term bonds. Peay won his 1924 reelection, and by the end of the decade Tennessee had over six thousand miles of state highways, costing 75 million dollars and increasing his popularity in rural areas and the tourism industry.²³ Interestingly enough, the dominant narrative is that there was widespread opposition to the roads in the rural areas of Tennessee while support was located in major cities or towns. However, Governor Peay's papers at the Tennessee State Library and Archives tells us a more complex story of interrelationship and patronage along the highway corridor.

Contrary to popular belief, there was support for the highway system in Middle Tennessee, whether it be support in the form of local businesses lobbying for a highway or labor being provided from the local community. In the case of the latter, two communications from Hartsville and Smithville, both near and familiar to Watertownians, proves enlightening. The first document was dated 27 June 1924 to a Mr. J. E. Moreland, Division Engineer in Nashville, Tennessee. The subject of the missive is Hartsville's labor situation. It reads, "In this particular community, the labor situation is a little tight at present...However, the situation will ease up in

²² Paul H. Bergeron et al, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 237.

²³ Dan Pierce, "Good Roads Movement," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010).

about three weeks after the farmers have finished cutting wheat and hay.”²⁴ A similar report is sent to the Division Engineer of the Second Division in Nashville from Junior Engineer Chas King 4 June 1924 from Smithville, Tennessee. King states that labor in Smithville is plentiful, citing the workers as “farmers who have abandoned farming...miners out of employment and a few school boys...as a whole, labor is very plentiful in this community.”²⁵ Though the two might seem different at first, one can trace commonalities. Both reports indicate that farmers in Hartsville and Smithville were willing to work, or at least the engineers on sight counted on them to work. Of all the rural groups in Tennessee, farmers were perhaps the most important group to the highways. They stood the most to lose if the highway came through their property and possibly the most to gain by using the highway to trade their produce. Traditionally, farmers participated in the corvee system which stipulated that farmers would maintain the roads in front of their property. This of course was not an effective method, and many farmers complained about the roads. However, instead of blaming the corvee system they blamed people for not living up to their obligations.²⁶ And as we have seen before, farmer’s traditionally opposed the highway system on the grounds of unnecessary taxation and the issue of state’s rights.²⁷ However, these communications suggest not only the agency of the farmer’s in exploiting the highway but show a sense of acceptance and even cooperation that is not part of traditional narratives.

²⁴ Communication to Mr. J. E. Moreland, Division Engineer at Nashville, TN 27 June, 1924, “Governor Austin Peay Papers,” Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

²⁵ Chas King to Division Engineer, Second Division Nashville, TN 4 June 1924, “Governor Austin Peay Papers,” Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

²⁶ Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South: Tennessee’s Upper Cumberland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 69-70.

²⁷ Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie*, 19.

Peay's papers also reveals systems of patronage and the exertion of political power. The next communication we will look at is from A.W. Jennings, Chairman of the Central Committee in Smithville to Governor Austin Peay dated 1 August 1923. Jennings is writing about an anticipated trip by Peay to inspect the highway route that would run through Smithville, Liberty, Alexandria, Watertown, and Lebanon. He writes, "We would like to have your permission and that of Mr. Creveling to advertise this trip and have the people to meet your party at the different towns along the route at an hour to be named in the posters, as it is our purpose to thoroly [sic] arouse the people as to the necessity of this road."²⁸ The tiny fraction of letters included in this section shows that the highway system, like Stilgoe's corridor, wielded a considerable amount of power and was capable of courting support from the movers and shakers along its route. However, the highway are not all powerful; it still relied on local leaders to convince their communities that the highway was beneficial for the community. Furthermore, the highway could not have built as quickly or as efficiently as it was without the supporter of the farmers and the miners that lived along its route.

MEMORY

Lastly, the Edsel Floyd Bridge provides a snapshot into methods of public memory and memorialization in the late 20th-early 21st century. The best way to approach this is not thematically, but with a series of question. Why did Watertown name a bridge after him while he was still living? They could just as easily have suggested that the square be named after him. Or they could have put a plaque, memorial or statue at the railroad stop, which is considered by many locals to be critical to Watertown's past and present identity. Town halls, community

²⁸ A. W. Jennings to Austin Peay 1 August 1923, "Governor Austin Peay Papers," Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

centers, even streets could be repurposed to have his name on it, all of which are visited by the populace more and allow for an interpretive space to tell his story. Was this a result of political intervention on Indeed this did happen in some form after Floyd died in 2011. The local (and only) grocery store put a sign up on the side of their building. On the side is a picture of Edsel Floyd and it is title “Mr. Watertown” with varying pictures of his life and times surrounding him.

Erika Doss in *Memorial Mania, Public Feeling in America* suggests that the answer might lie in the idea of “living memorials.” According to Doss, the idea of living memorials began with the development of World War II memorials. Communities were encouraged not to commission statues or cannonballs but instead focus on “useful things” such as memorial bridges, fountains, auditoriums, and community centers. Doss provides a 1948 survey of 265 American cities who had built or planned to build World War II monument. The results were forty two auditoriums, twenty nine parks, twenty stadiums, nineteen hospitals, and a variety of airports, art centers, libraries, museums and recreation centers.²⁹ These projects represent what Doss calls the threefold purpose of memorials: gratitude, remembrance, and inspiration. She writes “Since war memorials are generally the product of community effort, constructed with local funds and materials, the community itself has the responsibility of determining the form of memorial best adapted to its needs.”³⁰

Though there is little doubt that the bridge is quite useful, this profile does not fit the Edsel Floyd Bridge. Floyd’s military service is not the focus of his legacy. While it is certainly a key part of who he is, it was never his service that earned him the adoration of the community he

²⁹ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 193.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 192.



Figure 5: "Edsel Floyd plaque: Three Forks Marketplace." 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 6: "Edsel Floyd Plaque." 2017. Photo by author.

lived in. Rather, the focus lies on his longstanding service to the community itself in positions such as deacon-song leader for First Baptist Church or as the voice of the Purple Tigers. There is little doubt that the naming of the bridge was done out of gratitude, but it does not fit Doss' model which only allows for war memorials and an emphasis on military service. When one considers that Floyd was alive when the bridge was dedicated in 2007, the waters become even more murky

AN INTERPRETATION/CONCLUSION

So what is the story to be learned from the Edsel Floyd Bridge in Watertown? How are we supposed to interpret this interesting bit of material culture? How can it possibly tie together public memory, the history of the Tennessee Highway System, and Floyd's Watertown community? I would argue that the bridge is a physical manifestation of the relationship between the communities that the highway corridor touched and the physical/cultural shape of the highway itself.

As mentioned earlier, Stilgoe discusses depots and agents as being ambassadors to the community, wielders of the power of the railroad yet subject to the wants and desires of the community it was based in. The highway, both figuratively and literally, parallels the railroad. Farmers, community members, and railroad agents alike were all part of the highway ecosystem. For some farmers, the exploitation came in the opportunity to get a check for their family, for others it was an opportunity to expand their business and save on shipping costs. Community leaders saw the highways as being beneficial to their vision of their community, and large businesses, including the railroad industry the highway system was destined to replace, thought in commercial terms about how best to bolster their business with this new corridor. Through it all, the highway planners and engineers negotiated with their constituents as they moved along

the planned route. Though they ultimately decided the route and hired the workers, the planners of the highway system needed the aforementioned agents to hire the farmers and convince the communities that the highway would bring prosperity to Middle Tennessee. The patronage system provided them with the flexibility they needed; if by shifting the route of the roads to incorporate an out of the way town you gained the support of a major population, community, or business, what could you stand to lose?

Despite indications of agency, the new highway system very much mimicked the ecosystem in *Metropolitan Corridor*. In every ecosystem there is a hierarchy of power, and if you did not have access to the upper levels of hierarchy the say you had was greatly diminished. For every community that succeeded in courting the new highway corridor, several did not, and much like Stilgoe's metropolitan corridor, this new power also took from the traditional strength of small town America.³¹ Thriving communities died off, land was taken for the road, and traditional ways of life were interrupted. The promise of automotive America did not extend to everyone, and in time when the interstate came through, communities that had courted the original highways faced the same fate as those that lost the battle during the 1920's.

The Edsel Floyd Bridge is not only a memorial to a man, but a marker placed by the Watertown community on the highway corridor and a projection of the tensions present between traditional America and the values the highway represents. Although dedicating a community center after Floyd would have been just as useful and allowed for more interpretation than just driving by a sign at 45 m.p.h., it would not have accomplished the same purpose the bridge does. This bridge was not a public facing memorial. It was designed and conceived by members of the

³¹ Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor*, 193.

Watertown community. For these natives passing by, the bridge is an affirmation and representation of the values and ideas that they hold dear. It encourages in those who were acquainted with Floyd reflection on his life of public service, and in those who just know his name a sense of civic pride. It serves an important role for a growing town increasingly influenced by the outside world and the Nashville country music super industry.³² It represents a community exerting its control on a highway system that, while providing it with the lifeblood it needs to exist, is also fundamentally changing it.

Though the Edsel Floyd Bridge provides an excellent opportunity to examine the history of the good roads movement in Tennessee, the life of Edsel Floyd and his impact on the Watertown community, and the ways in which memorialization shapes landscapes, the question of who decides the route still remains. In this chapter we were briefly introduced to Austin Peay and his activities in the construction of roads in Tennessee. In the following pages, we will take a harder look at his governorship from 1923-1927 and the ways in which power and patronage, fostered and wielded by Peay's administration, dominated the construction of the Memphis-Bristol Highway.

³² Alexandra Harper, "Miranda Lambert Gets Pampered While Filming New Music Video in Tennessee Town," Country Common, Accessed 31 March 2017, <http://www.countrycommon.com/miranda-lambert-films-new-music-video-and-gets-pampered-in-tennessee-town/>.

CHAPTER II: POWER AND PATRONAGE: AUSTIN PEAY AND THE MEMPHIS-
BRISTOL, 1923-1927

Historians describe Governor Austin Peay as the “Good Roads Governor” and credit him for accelerating the good roads movement in Tennessee. One of Austin Peay’s major campaign points during his bid for governorship was his promise to take politics out of road building. However, once he was elected, Austin Peay and his Highway Commissioners received a multitude of letters from different individuals, businesses, and entities requesting to be included on the route of the Memphis-Bristol Highway. These writers believed that they could exert their influences, in whatever form that took, to change something as monumental as the Memphis-Bristol. Road building, despite Peay’s promises, was to be an inherently political process. Power and patronage dominated the construction of the Memphis-Bristol Highway. The public at large continued to perceive road building as political, an observation reinforced by the way that Peay administered the State Highway Department.

The systems of power and patronage that permeated the building of the Memphis-Bristol reveal much about Peay’s administration and the way that it interacted with the various individuals, entities, and communities along its route. The Memphis-Bristol Highway Association announced the road’s original route in 1911. Businessmen mostly composed the original Memphis-Bristol association was composed mostly of businessmen. While their reasoning for the route selected remains murky, it is important to note that each of the members of the association included their town on the original route.¹ Two years earlier, the

¹ Route of the Memphis-Nashville-Bristol highway, 1911, Tennessee State Library and Archives Map Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN, Accessed 11/8/2017, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15138coll23/id/53>

ROUTE OF Memphis-Nashville-Bristol Highway

TENNESSEE'S FIRST STATE ROAD

Aura Rock Crusher
All kinds of stones
crushed for
building or
other purposes.
Capacity 100 bushels
per hour.



A heavy roller with four rollers

**Western
Variable Grader**
FOR JOB AND ROAD
WORK OF ALL KINDS



**Austin Sprinkling
Wagons**
Other sizes



Patented by Wilson, Ingram & Co., Chicago
Manufactured by
Austin Machine Works
Chicago, Ill.

**WESTERN
WHEELED
SCRAPER**
It is the one you have always
been afraid of



Dump Wagons
Take Austin
It is built for Pull, Push and Load (Long)



ROAD OPENED August 1, 1911
WORK STOPPED September 1, 1911
WORK IN THE COURSE OF SEPTEMBER 1, 1911



COMPLETED
ACME METAL CO. SYSTEMS
SUPERIOR METAL CO. SYSTEMS

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Figure 7: "Route of the Memphis-Nashville-Bristol highway (1911)." 1911. Tennessee State Library and Archives Map Collection, Nashville

Tennessee General Assembly had created a State Commission on Public Roads. Tennessee governor Malcolm Patterson selected three salaried men to head the Commission. These men proposed the idea that they should build 1,826 miles of state highways and 4,800 miles of inter-county highways. The Commission identified the Memphis-Bristol as a top priority for road building.² However, it was not until Governor Ben W. Hooper took office in 1912 that the first surveying processes for the Memphis-Bristol began and uniform plans were made up.³

The man that would go on to become the “good roads governor” of Tennessee was born near Hopkinsville, Kentucky on June 1, 1876. Peay’s father served in the Kentucky legislature and was a former Confederate soldier. Before entering politics Peay was a lawyer, having obtained his law degree from Centre College located in Danville, Kentucky. After marrying his wife Sallie Hurst of Clarksville, Tennessee, Peay moved to Montgomery County and entered into state politics in 1900 as a member of the Tennessee legislature.⁴ Peay was a successful businessman, owning and managing tobacco farms, working with the railroad in service of the city, and even representing Clarksville businessmen who entered into a mining venture in Durango, Mexico.⁵ By the time that Peay began gearing up for his campaign in 1922, he had an income of approximately \$30,000.⁶

Austin Peay’s campaign for governorship in 1923 addressed new roads a key political issue. During his campaign Peay frequently remarked that “politics and roads don’t mix.”⁷ This

² Leland R. Johnson, *Memphis to Bristol: A Half Century of Highway Construction-A History of the Tennessee Road Builders Association* (Nashville: Tennessee Road Builders Association, 1978), 30.

³ Ibid, 31.

⁴ Joseph Tant Macpherson, *Democratic Progressivism in Tennessee: The Administrations of Governor Austin Peay, 1923-1927* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979), 383.

⁵ Ibid, 384. This mining venture ended in calamity for Austin Peay and the Clarksville businessmen as Pancho Villa killed the manager of the mine and seized the mine for himself.

⁶ Ibid, 384.

⁷ Johnson, *Memphis to Bristol*, 35.

was not just a general statement about the nature of road building in general; after all, citizens of Tennessee would have been intimately familiar with the corruption and graft that was part and parcel of the corvee system and the widespread use of convict labor. Rather, it was directed toward his immediate predecessor, Governor “Alf” Taylor. Peay in a campaign speech said that “the department will never be an effective instrument for building a modern system of roads in Tennessee as long as it remains in politics. If the next legislature will follow my suggestions we will put this department in hands and a basis where it will be a joy and blessing to the people.”⁸

Governor Taylor responded pointedly, calling Peay a belligerent outsider, who clashes with “every individual and influence in the state that does not rush quickly to his support and humbly beg his permission to vote for him.” Governor Taylor also used Peay’s own words against him. Peay was purported to have said “We cannot get Federal aid without a highway department, but if we cannot have a better department we had better abandon the whole business.”⁹ Taylor accused Peay of being willing to sacrifice the good roads of Tennessee just because the Highway Department would not bow down and politically serve him. This campaign illustrates that both candidates understood the power of patronage in Tennessee road building efforts.

Peay won the election by 141,002 votes to Taylor’s 102,586.¹⁰ After this inauguration, he immediately fired Taylor’s paid Highway Commission and appointed J.G. Creveling as the sole Highway Commissioner. An independently wealthy engineer, and a Republican, Creveling had served as the head of the Davidson County Road Commission from 1917-1923. Leland Johnson

⁸ Austin Peay, *The Camden chronicle*, October 6th, 1922, Accessed 11/8/2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89058013/1922-10-06/ed-1/seq-4/>.

⁹ Gov. Alf A. Taylor, “Supreme Arrogance of Mr. Austin Peay,” *Jackson County sentinel*, October 26, 1922.

¹⁰ Phillip Langsdon, *Tennessee: A Political History* (Franklin: Hillsboro Press, 2000), 303-309.

in *Memphis to Bristol* writes that after appointing Creveling, Peay instructed him to “clean house,” essentially purging the Highway Department of all the men who espoused overtly political motives and leanings.¹¹ Creveling pulled every man in the department into his office and asked the following questions; have you been too active politically to serve under Governor Peay and can you be loyal to the department? Many of the previous staff passed this test, although there is some debate as to whether they were allowed to continue their services because of their lack of political activity or if they were retained because highwaymen were in such short supply in Tennessee.¹²

Despite Peay’s efforts to remove the politics from road building, the public still believed the building of the Memphis-Bristol, and roads in general, to be political in nature and malleable in its final form. Peay’s collection is filled with letters from communities begging to be a part of the Memphis-Bristol route, often invoking relationships with Peay and his administration in the hopes that they would get a piece of the road building action. The routing of the road had a very real impact on the future of some of these communities and their counties, lending an almost frantic urgency to their requests. Appointments, hiring, firing, and even the placement of some roads indicated that Peay was willing to support those loyal to him. With everything at stake, the communities had to try to reach the Governor’s eye.

Political patronage was at the forefront of the mind of H.V. Senter from Medina in Gibson County when he wrote to Austin Peay from November of 1923 to February of 1924. The first letter from Senter to Peay, dated November 24, 1923, was about the location of the Memphis-Bristol Highway. Senter wanted the Memphis-Bristol to be routed by way of

¹¹ Johnson, *Memphis to Bristol*, 35.

¹² *Ibid*, 36.

McLemoresville, Milan, and Medina, but instead it ran through the hills of Carrol County. He refuted the justification that it was “cheaper” or “easier” to build the highway along the route that was chosen, stating that since the highways were advertised as being for the people and free of politics, that there was no reason why it should not go through Milan, unless of course it is not about the people and is about politics. Senter finished his letter saying as much, condemning Peay and the way he conducted his administration:

It is generally understood that these good roads are to be built where they will be of most benefit to the masses; and not built for some special interest, and if they are to be built for the benefit of the masses there is not argument to make against the McLemoresville, Milan and Median route, but if they are to be built for some special interest then of course the road would go over the hill route as near to Crawford Springs and the Fox hunting grounds of West Tennessee.

We don't want the Department of Highways mixed up in Politics; but if Gibson county is not going to get any consideration in road construction that will be of benefit to her citizens, we can make a political issue out of it.¹³

Austin Peay, in a response that has since been lost, apparently reassured Senter that road building was free of politics, that the roads were being placed where they would do the most good, and that he did not care about the political consequences. The response from Senter was predictable, saying that while Peay might not care he [Senter] did care, and that if Peay expected the cooperation of the people, he should include the people when making decisions that would affect them financially for years to come.¹⁴

¹³ H.V. Senter to Austin Peay, “Since my return home from Nashville Tuesday, I understand that Gibson County will get no consideration in Highway construction,” November 24, 1923, Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹⁴ H.V. Senter to Austin Peay, “I have your letter of the 18th, for which I thank you,” February 19th, 1924, Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

Senter was not the only one from West Tennessee to accuse Peay of political patronage. J.B. Rhodes wrote that “politics should not enter into the building of the road, but unfortunately it sometimes does. While I do not think there is any politics in this, and I do not want it to be in the future, but I feel that the interest of the people to be served by this [being the Memphis-Bristol] Highway.”¹⁵ Both authors thought that Peay was not serving the people, and feared that systems of power and patronage were running the highway. It is telling that Senter mentioned the fox hunting grounds, as previous letter to Peay came from someone who represented the hunting grounds. Taken together, these letters suggest that each and every one of the letter writers expected good to come from writing Peay or his Highway Commissioner. This hope, this belief that they could alter the road by invoking a myriad number of issues with Peay was the direct result of a real, functioning system of power and patronage that Peay exercised within his administration.

C. Hanson and the “tax payers of Shelby, Tipton, and Fayette Counties” were one group that petitioned Peay for relocation of the Memphis-Bristol late in the process, in early 1925. Printed on a Pleasant Ridge Cotton Plantation and Farm Commissary stationery and signed by twenty-one other citizens, the letter invoked the beginning of the Declaration of Independence in an attempt to have the highway rerouted:

We as an organized body of Citizens, and Tax Payers of Shelby, Tipton, and Fayette Counties and the adjoining counties, cooperation for our mutual well fare for the betterment of Public Roads, which are necessarily needed, you unnecessarily neglected, in the most densely populated districts with many inland TOWNS, around which are many small FARMS; and we think is the GARDEN

¹⁵ J. B. Rhodes to Austin Peay, “The Memphis to Bristol Highway has not yet been finally determined, as I am informed,” Nov. 24th, 1923, , Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

SPOT OF WEST TENN, earnestly appeal to you, to grant us a 2nd. Survey for the Memphis-Bristol Highway.¹⁶

By emphasizing towns, farms, and the garden spot image, the citizens invoked the familiar rhetoric that surrounded the good roads movement and its early proponents. For them, the Memphis-Bristol still represented the good roads movement. Unfortunately for these communities, by 1925 the good highway movement dominated road building and planning, and their requests went unanswered as the Memphis-Bristol bypassed them as originally planned.

Though political clout and the invocation of the original mission of the good roads movement dominated some of the letters, many more reminded Peay of the individual, organization, or entities' political affiliations. W.T. Shelton wrote Highway Commissioner C.N. Bass, the successor of Creveling, on June 18, 1927 about a proposed road from Somerville to Mason on to Brandon that would connect the Memphis-Bristol with the Lee Highway (US 11). The beginning of Shelton's letter talked about the "shamefulness of the previous legislature," contrasting it with how effective Peay's administration is. Shelton then proceeds to remind Peay about all he did, all he sacrificed, to support him during his campaign. Shelton writes, "All the people of this section know, of course, that I have been a loyal supporter of yours, since the very first campaign, some years ago, when you first entered the primary for the Democratic nomination, at which time you were opposed by a personal friend from my native county of Tipton."¹⁷ He goes on to say that he wonders if he should have even supported him in his campaign, then says "I am congratulating myself, that I should have chosen so wisely in giving

¹⁶ C.Hanson (Chairman Memphis-Bristol Highway Western Division) to J.G. Creveling, January 22 1925, Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹⁷ W. T. Shelton to Austin Peay, "It has been quite a while, since I have troubled you in any way," June 18th, 1927, Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

you my constant support up to this present day.”¹⁸ It should also be noted that the letter was written on Longtown Supply Company paper, a business owned by Mr. Shelton and located along the proposed route.

This letter reveals much about what writers believed they could sway Peay with and what Peay considered to be valuable. During Peay’s campaign, Alf Taylor mentioned that Peay was an outsider, and that he brooked no one who did not agree with him. And while those aspersions were certainly cast by Taylor to weaken Peay’s candidacy, evidence for Peay’s dismissal of those that opposed him is evident, as made clear by Creveling’s directive to fire anyone who had been involved in overtly political activity against Peay and his campaign. Thus, Shelton’s letter is carefully crafted, showing Peay that he not only supported him but that he was not a “fair weather fan,” that he had supported him even in the face of adversity. In fact, as we shall see, this method proved to be one of the most effective and common means by which people communicated with Peay, and the formula frequently yielded results. Shelton’s gambit ended up paying off, as Peay apparently wrote C.N. Bass about the proposed route. While Shelton’s request could not be accommodated at that specific point in time due to financial reasons, Bass assured Peay that this road would be built, “we could assure Mr. Shelton that the geography of the section and the policies established will insure this section of a State Highway.”¹⁹

The last method by which people approached Austin Peay for inclusion on the routes was by either outright accusing him or insinuating that the road building process remained a political endeavor. Peay’s papers are full of letters incredulous over the routing of the roads and the

¹⁸ W. T. Shelton, “It has been quite a while, since I have troubled you in any way,” June 18th, 1927, Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹⁹ C.N. Bass to Austin Peay, “I have your letter of June 30th, enclosing a letter from Squire W. T. Shelton of Mason,” July 11th, 1927, Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

possible political motivations. One such letter is from an author, whose name is illegible but was typed on Freed-Hardeman College paper, to Austin Peay, dated September 12th, 1927. This letter was in reference to a connecting road to the Memphis-Bristol Highway. At the time, it illuminates several key points as to the development of roads in Tennessee. The letter began by claiming that Henderson, the seat of Chester County and the location of Freed-Hardeman College, had received unequal treatment when compared to other county seats and even other small towns. The letter writer was mostly concerned about the location of the road and the possible consequences that could arise from it. The author wrote “We know, that according to the present location, tourists going south will never know that our place exists, and will, therefore, pass us by unnoticed...No attempt has been made to explain the crooks, bends, and crossings to accommodate other towns and the impossibility of such to do likewise here.” This seemed particularly egregious to the author, who noted that if the engineers had not curved the road west, it would have gone straight into the heart of town.²⁰

Indeed, to this community the changes would have seemed arbitrary at best, and sinister at worst. The author reflected the concerns expressed in other letters to Peay, namely the loss of tourist business for towns located so far off the beaten path. When confronted with issues like these, the Highway Commissioner would often respond and say that the surveyed route was the most cost effective choice. However, as we have seen with Shelton, Peay was willing to intervene and guide his commissioners in their choices, even if he would not outright tell them what to do. Thus this letter represents not a futile attempt to have the road’s route changed, but

²⁰ Author illegible to Austin Peay, “Freed-Hardeman College,” September 12, 1927, Governor Austin Peay Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

an effort the writers believed would have a genuine chance at effecting change. Within this context, it becomes apparent that the author felt that he or she had fallen outside the web of power and patronage; why else would a small connecting road not be built or at least recognized as a future possibility?

Far from removing the politics involved in road building, Peay made extensive use of his administration's power to appoint those who fell under his systems of power and patronage and dismiss those who would oppose his personal views of the roads.

What motivated these people to write Peay? And what chance did they think they stood of causing a change in the route? Peay did indeed continue to use systems of power and patronage during the building of his road and his administration. The appearance of the administration from the outside was not one free of politics, but one that wielded it to yield desired results. We now know through hindsight that these letters would not succeed, but at that time, there was no reason for the authors to think they wouldn't succeed. This suggests a change in the narrative of road construction in Tennessee, that the "Good Roads Governor," however impartial he thought himself to be, through the running of his administration continued and cultivated the belief that the building of roads was, is, and possibly would always be tied to systems of power and patronage.

Peay's sudden death in office in 1927 brought to a close one era of road building in Tennessee. Though road building certainly constituted an important political platform before Peay's campaign and subsequent election, under Peay's administration it became a focal point and the primary target of state spending from 1923-1927. It would not be until the 1930's and the coming of the New Deal that Tennessee again witnessed an increased emphasis on roads and life infrastructure. These new public works projects, combined with the growing accessibility of

automobiles and prosperity following World War II, wrought dramatic changes to Tennessee's cultural landscapes. This next chapter will analyze one New Deal corridor, U.S. 70N, and the resources along its route to illustrate those changes.

CHAPTER III: U.S. 70N AS A NEW DEAL TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR



Figure 8: "U.S. Highway 70 North, five miles east of Lebanon, Tennessee. May 3rd, 1939." Tennessee State Library and Archives Department of Conservation Photograph Collection, Nashville.

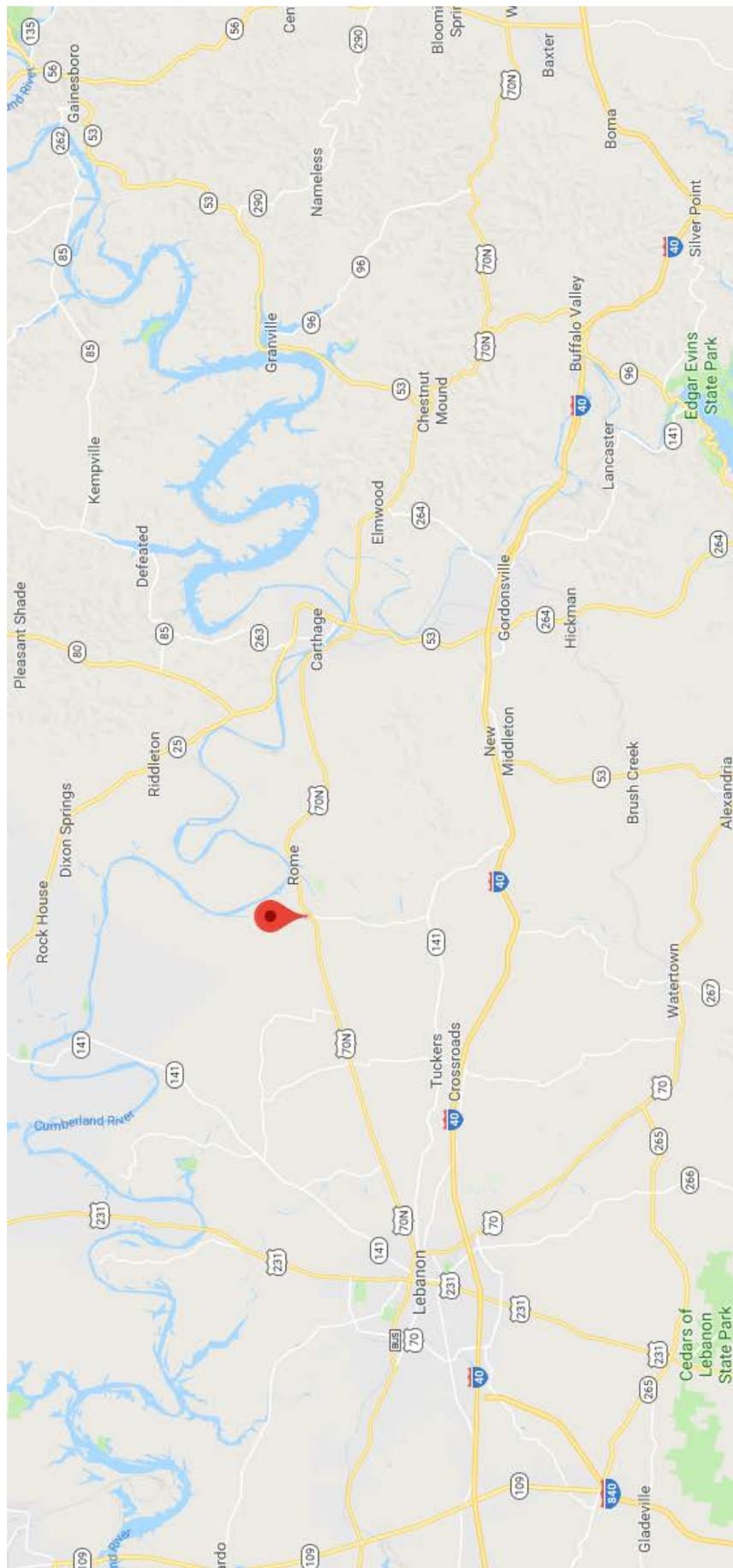


Figure 9: "U.S. 70N," 2018. Google Maps

The route of U.S 70N from Lebanon, Wilson County, to Gentry, Putnam County, represents a New Deal transportation corridor that transformed rural life in Middle Tennessee. U.S. 70N, constructed in 1939, winds eastward from the Central Basin to the Cumberland Plateau. Its purpose was to be establish a modern highway connection between Lebanon, an antebellum county seat in Middle Tennessee, to the more Cumberland Plateau Putnam County to the east. IN the middle was Carthage, a declining Cumberland River port town. The new highway replaced an earlier turnpike between Lebanon and Rome, where a ferry existed, but then carved a new route eastward into the plateau.

U.S. Highway 70N begins at the eastern end of the city limits of Lebanon. Interestingly, this end of town was the focal point of the historic African American neighborhood of Lebanon. Even today such key African American institutions as Pickett Rucker United Methodist, Saddler Funeral Home, and JC Hellum Funeral Home are near the intersection (see figure 3). In fact, the original U.S. 70N route, marked in the map as Carthage Highway, passed the north edge of the town's historic African American cemetery, Rest Hill Cemetery, that was established in 1868. Rest Hill was formed from three acres donated by B.B. Mason, Nicholas Manson, Joseph Provine, and Thomas Stokes when they purchased a 150 acre lot outside of Lebanon 1867. From 1867-1933, Rest Hill served as the only African American cemetery in Lebanon.

U.S. 70N AS AN ENGINEERED LANDSCAPE

When looking at cultural resources during a survey it is easy to get swept up in the gas stations, motels, schools, and bridges that dot the landscape. However, it is equally important to look at the highway itself and analyze the ways in which it interacts with the landscape. When departing Lebanon on U.S. 70N you climb a small incline surrounded by light industrial buildings and some chain stores. Many of these buildings and businesses date from the 1970's-

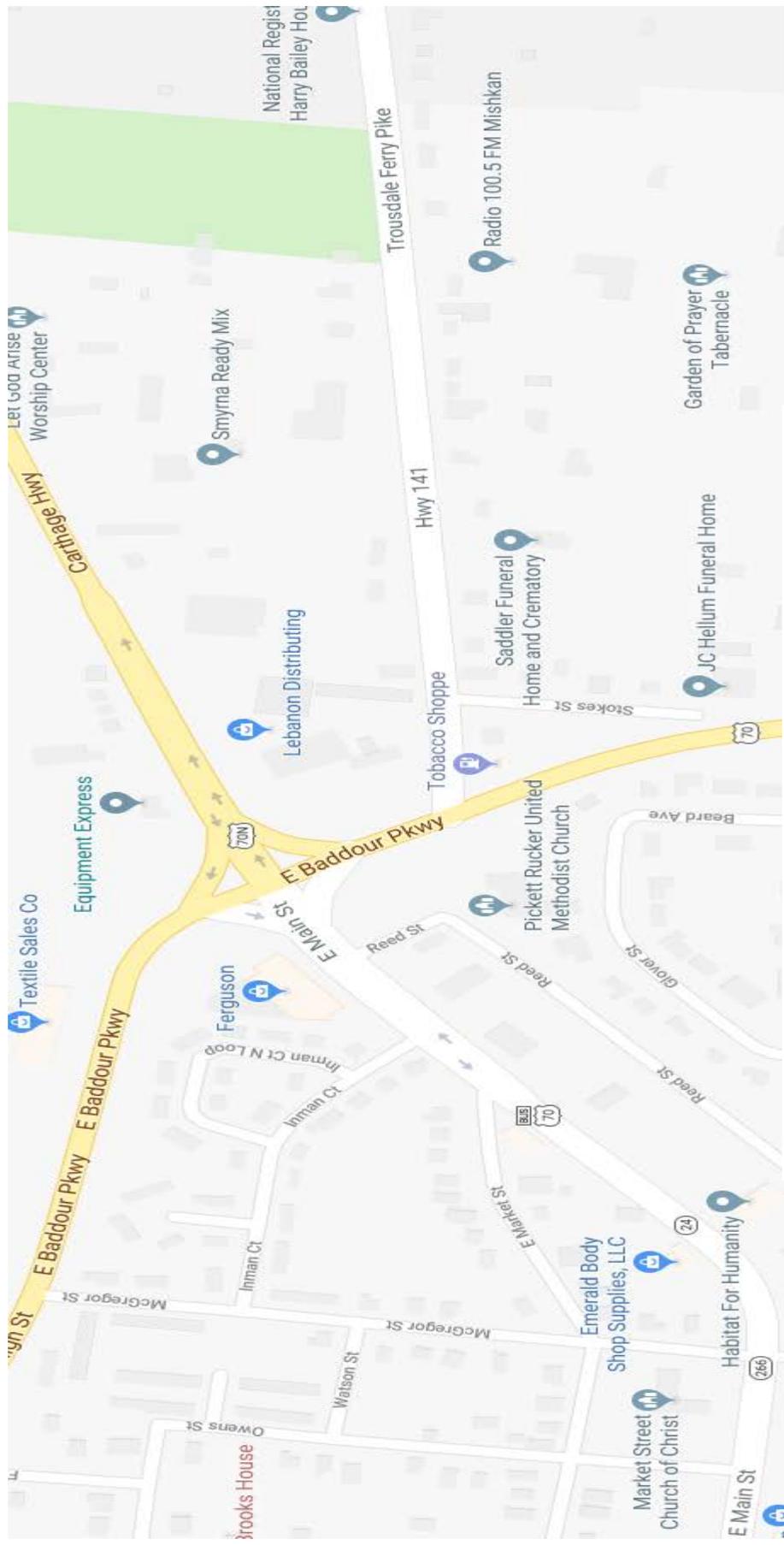


Figure 10. "East Market Street Community." 2018. Google Maps



Figure 11: "Rest Hill Cemetery." 2018. Photo by author.



Figure 12: “Rest Hill Cemetery with Trousdale Pike (Highway 141) at right.” 2018. Photo by author.

1980's, products of Lebanon's growth over the years. As you crest the hill, U.S. 70N unfolds before you, stretching straight into the rural countryside (see Figure 6). The traffic that is on U.S. 70N consists almost entirely of commuter traffic with farm equipment, such as tractors, venturing on the road on rare occasions. More than other highways, it is easy to imagine what U.S. 70N would have looked like during the first half the twentieth-century.

The straight nature of U.S. 70N suggest that this highway was built for the sole purpose of transporting mass volumes of goods and merchandise quickly and efficiently (see Figure 7). Though there are certainly roadside gas stations and motels that would have served travelers, this is not a tourist highway. U.S. 70N dominates the landscape, bypassing the original alignment of Old Rome Pike and older communities, like Bellwood, in favor of speed and efficiency. This of course affected many communities on the route, as evidenced by the Rome community (see Figure 8). Due to efforts to keep the New Deal road level, the highway is raised up over the landscape. When passing by Rome you are literally looking down on the community, which sits a good twelve feet below the highway. Where property once had a view of the hills now it stares at the embankment, vehicles rumble overhead and trash accumulates in backyards and on top of houses. U.S. 70N is a definitive statement that good highways have supplanted good roads and that the focus is not on connecting communities with the rest of the state but with fostering commerce.

However, a shift occurs after passing through South Carthage. Whereas before U.S. 70N ran in a more or less straight line, now it begins to curve and bend to the landscape around it (see Figure 9). Here we see the intersection of modern highway building technology with traditional routes of travel. On some stretches of the road U.S. 70N parallels the Cumberland River, perhaps the oldest transportation route in the region. In other places the highway wraps climbs up and



Figure 13: “View of U.S. 70N, outside Lebanon city limits.” 2018. Photo by author.

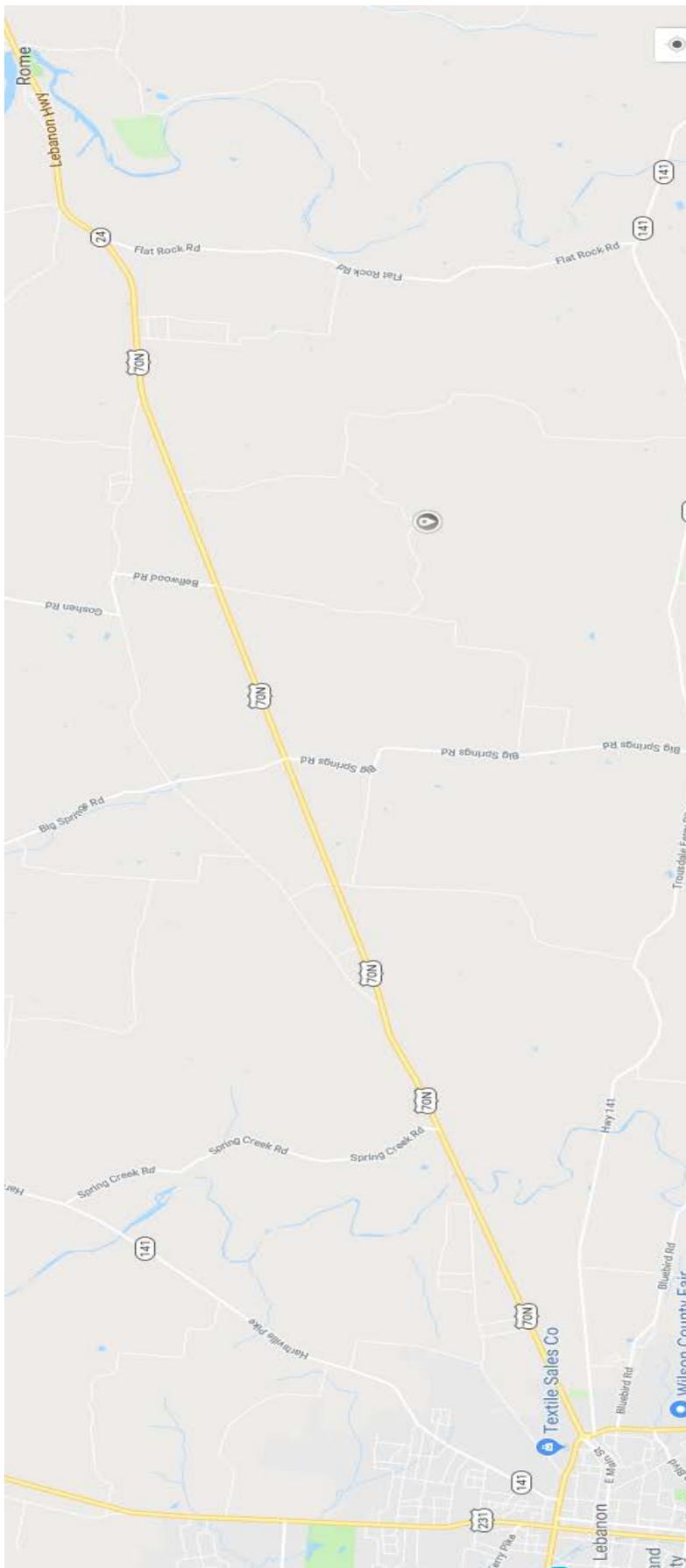


Figure 14: "U.S. 70N Route from Lebanon to Rome." 2018. Google Maps.



Figure 15: "Engineered Landscape near Rome, TN." 2018. Photo by author.



Figure 16: "U.S. 70N Route from South Carthage to Baxter." 2018. Google Maps.

around towering hills, sheer cliff face on one side and a sheer drop on the other, protected by guardrails. As we continue on to Gentry School in Putnam county we see a Tennessee Historical Marker for the “The Last Stagecoach Hold-Up” in Tennessee which took place in October of 1882. This landscape reveals to us that in addition to changing previous routes of travel, U.S. 70N also accommodated traditional routes of travel into its design. It would not be until the construction of the interstate system that transportation technology was finally able to bend the landscape to its complete and utter will.

L-RANCHO MOTOR COURT (LEBANON ASSISTED LIVING) & HICKORY HILL MOTEL & CAFÉ

There are two extant motels located along my route of examination on U.S. 70N; the L-Rancho Motor Court, now Lebanon Assisted Living, located at 941 Carthage Highway and the Hickory Hill Motel & Café, located at 5710 Carthage Highway. A third existed, Hundley’s Tourotel, near 8282 Carthage Highway, though its exact location still remains unconfirmed.¹ These two resources represent a phenomenon that swept across a newly mobile nation beginning in the 1920’s and lasting through the late 1960’s. In addition to being representative of the broader national trend of motel development, they also hint at a forgotten past of U.S. 70N. Before the development of the interstate, U.S. 70N was a bustling transportation corridor, providing travelers and tourists a quick and reliable route that connected cities and towns like Lebanon, Rome, South Carthage, and Cookeville to the rest of the state.

¹ Hundley’s Tourotel was a rather significant complex that featured a gas station, a restaurant, a garage, and several residential units. While the approximate location has been identified, the subdividing of the property several times over, combined with the destruction of its original structures, have hampered the identification process.

The L-Rancho Motor Court lies on the left of U.S. 70N on the outskirts of Lebanon's city limits. Today it is known as Lebanon Independent Living, an assisted living company that provides care for people ages 50 and over. The L-Rancho Motor Court was operated from 1946 by Louise Anderson until it closed in the late 1980's.² Since then, the property has served in many functions, with the most recent being The Music Box, a bar and music venue.³ In addition, the L-Rancho was involved in legal trouble. On January 27th, 2014, officers from the Tennessee methamphetamine task force found an illegal meth lab located on the property, resulting in a Notice and Order of Quarantine.⁴ The office is located in the middle of the property and is surrounded by a circular drive, on which are located the individual residential units.

The Hickory Hill Motel & Café lies on the right of U.S. 70 North headed from Lebanon to South Carthage. An office is located near the highway with a white picket fence built from left to right and the sign is located behind the fence and reads "Hickory Hill Motel Café: Air Conditioned." Surrounding the office is a square drive on which the residential units are located. Reuben M. Stafford and his wife Barbara O. Stafford purchased the property from Thomas I. Purnell for \$2,000 on October 15, 1945.⁵ After purchasing the property, the Staffords built the Hickory Hill Motel and operated it until they sold everything to E.S. Eatherly for \$26,000. This was then deeded from E.S. Eatherly and Robert Bryan to E.S. Eatherly Construction

² Despite sorting through deeds at the Wilson County Register's Office, I could find no definite build date. When Albert Stone sold the property the L-Rancho sits on to Louise Anderson on July 23rd, 1946 for \$52,000 there was no mention of the L-Rancho or its buildings. However, in the deed of sale from Louise Anderson to Danny and Rita Ann Owns, the following is recorded; "This is included in this sell of the above described real estate, all of the equipment and fixtures in the restaurant building and the cabins." This excerpt is located in Deed Book 364, pages 87-88.

³ Linda Grandstaff, *From the Wilson County Archives: Collection of Images*, 166.

⁴ Notice and Order of Quarantine, 1st January 2014, Wilson County, Tennessee, Deed Book 1580, page 1202. Wilson County Registers Office, Lebanon, Tennessee.

⁵ Deed of Sale from Thomas I. Purnell to Reuben M. Stafford, 15 October 1945, Wilson County, Tennessee, Deed Book 119, page 58. Wilson County Register's Office, Lebanon, Tennessee.

Incorporated for \$1.00 on February 25, 1952.⁶ Records indicate that the motel continued to operate to the end of the twentieth-century, with the last owner being Evelyn G. Irwin, who sold the property to John and Belinda Johnson for \$349,999 on August 30, 2004.⁷

The survival of both of the motels as residential units, while it may seem surprising, conforms to national trends. John Jakle writes, “compared with other features of the American roadside, such as gasoline stations and quick-service restaurants, motels tended to hold to their original function, although not necessarily their design integrity, longer.”⁸ Furthermore, this is not an isolated trend in the Lebanon area. The route of U.S. 231, which passes through Lebanon’s square towards the Cumberland River, has four motels, all of which are still standing and serving as permanent residential units.

Each of the motel’s continued use as a residential unit aids in their preservation, although they still face unique challenges, one of which is the actual construction of the motels themselves. The *Tourist Court Plan Book*, a publication catering to motel owners, said “it is wise to build out of materials that will last say 15 or 20 years for by that time the court will likely be outmoded.”⁹ Furthermore, motels, along with other roadside commercial architecture, has traditionally been overlooked by preservationists and historians alike. David Weible of the National Trust for Historic Preservation says in his article “In Defense of: Historic Motels” that motels are overlooked because they do not have a strong sense of style. Furthermore, motels are

⁶ Deed of Sale from Robert Bryan, et al. to Eatherly Construction Company, 25 February 1953 (filed 29 February, 1952), Wilson County, Tennessee, Deed Book 135, page 219. Wilson County Register’s Office, Lebanon, Tennessee.

⁷ Deed of Sale from Evelyn G. Irwin to John Johnson, 30th August 2004, Wilson County, Tennessee, Deed Book 1202, pages 1701-1703. Wilson County Register’s Office, Lebanon, Tennessee.

⁸ John Jakle et al, *The Motel in America*, 56.

⁹ John Jakle et al, *The Motel in America*, 41.

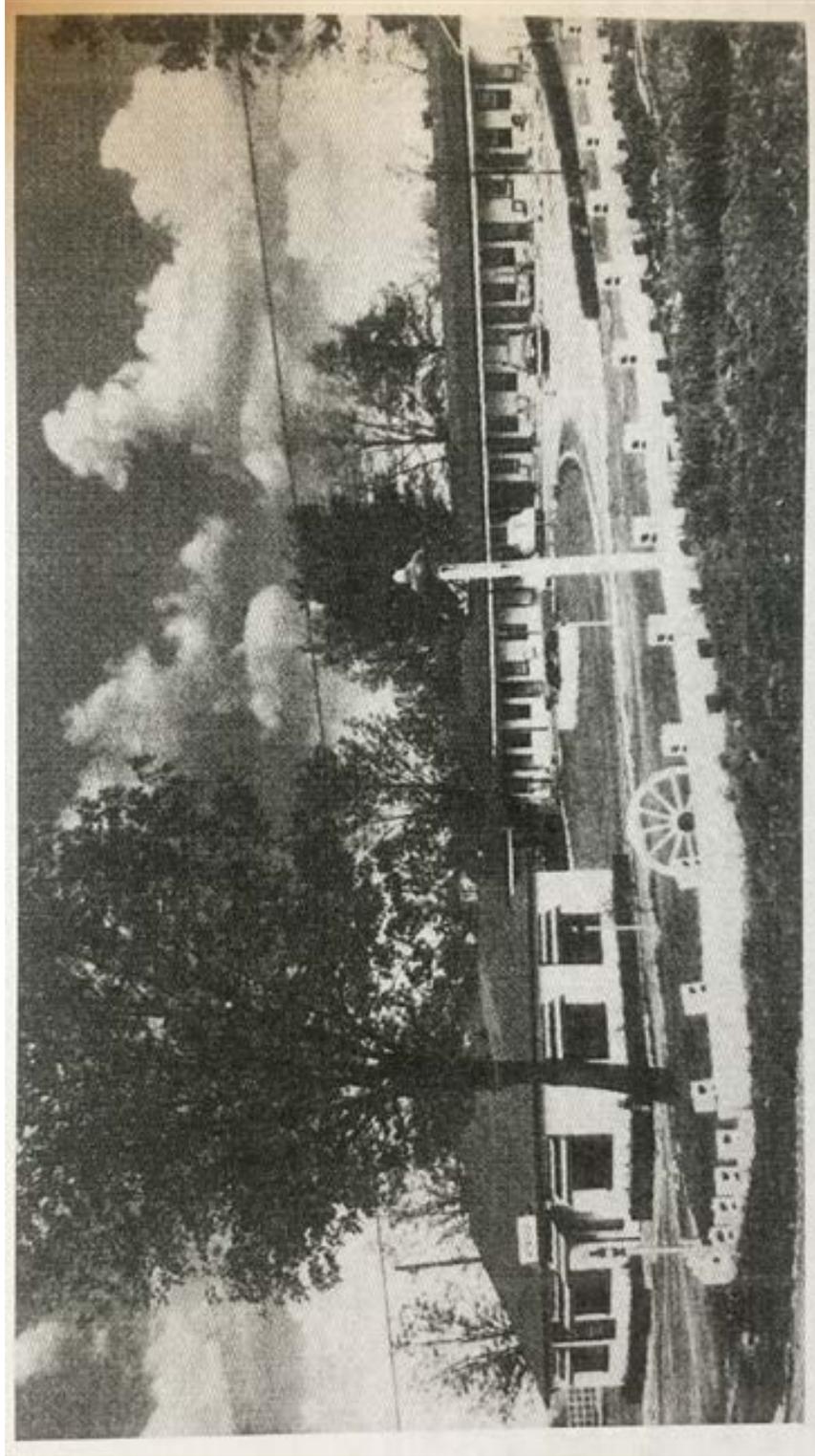


Figure 17: "L-Rancho Motor Court" in Linda Grandstaff's, *From the Wilson County Archives: Collection of Images*, (Lebanon: Wilson County Archives, 2015), 166



Figure 18: "L-Rancho Motor Court." 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 19: "Hickory Hill Motel and Residential Units and Sign." 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 20: "Hickory Hill Motel Front Office." 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 21: "Hickory Hill Garage, Office and Sign." 2017. Photo by author.

frequently located in less desirable sections of the city.¹⁰ The lack of strong architectural significance, combined with their locations, means that nomination to the National Register is a difficult process.

WHITE'S FILLING STATION

White's Service Station is located just past the Wilson County line at 915 Lebanon Highway. A small, unassuming white cinder block building with a green pitched roof, the building proudly displays its history on the front of the building; "White's Service Station: Since 1928." On the left edge of the property stands a Pure Oil sign. Out front is two gas pumps under a detached canopy. A large tank is located to the right of the property, and scattered about is various machinery and tools that suggest it is more of a repair shop than a service station these days.

The development of the gas station in rural areas followed a different trajectory than those located in the city or heavily populated areas. Due to their isolated nature and smaller clientele, these stations became multiple use properties, offering the public services in the forms of restaurant, inns, repair garages, and oil depots.¹¹ Within this context, the owners established White's Service Station in 1928. Though the station had been operated for a year by the Ingram family at the same spot, the White family purchased it a year later in 1928. Gary White, the current owner, took over the business in 1965 once his dad passed away. White's Service Station thrived due to its location on the original State Route 24 and later U.S. 70N. Gary White in an interview for *The Wilson Post* reminisced that his father drew good trade from people traveling

¹⁰ David Weible, "In Defense Of: Historic Motels," National Trust for Historic Preservation, October 8th, 2015, accessed 11/20/2017, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/in-defense-of-historic-motels#.WhMYbv1SzIU>.

¹¹ Chad Randl, "The Preservation and Reuse of Historic Gas Stations," <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/46-gas-stations.htm>.

from Livingston and Cookeville to Nashville.¹² Before the interstate system, U.S. 70N was the primary route for those that sought to travel from Nashville to Knoxville. By all accounts, White's Service Station was in position to continue benefitting from travel for the foreseeable future.

However, White's Service Station, as was the case with so many highway commercial businesses, experienced a sharp down-turn in business when Interstate 40 was built. Gary White, when asked the biggest change that he had seen, responded "I-40 happening in the '60s. It was just like ghost town then. After it opened, the traffic left 70, but it's come back. So many people have moved back." White's Service Station had to expand on the services it offered to attract more business. In addition to gasoline and car repair, White's Service Station began selling new and used tires as well as offering small engine repair services on mowers and tillers. Though White's offers multiple services, it still faces an uncertain future. Their prices can never be as competitive as major gas station chains and their location, once a boon to business, is now a liability. Gary White attributes the hard times facing the business to corporate greed, but in reality the development of the interstate system has shifted their traditional base of business away from these secondary highways towards the massive transportation corridors of the latter half of the twentieth century.¹³

White's Service Station possesses unique features that are indicative of the broader national history of filling stations. The large display windows that became so popular in the 1920's. These windows, in addition to advertising accessories for sale, also communicated

¹² Ken Beck, "The last real filling station," *The Wilson Post*, September 2nd, 2015, accessed 11/20/2017, https://www.wilsonpost.com/community/the-last-real-filling-station/article_be3add87-cdaa-5cbb-86dc-5b1863fdc380.html

¹³ Ken Beck, "The last real filling station," https://www.wilsonpost.com/community/the-last-real-filling-station/article_be3add87-cdaa-5cbb-86dc-5b1863fdc380.html.



Figure 22: "Pure Oil Sign, White's Service Station." 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 23: "White's Service Station." 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 24: "White's Service Station Pumps." 2017. Photo by author.

transparency and modern efficiency, two traits valued during the 1920's. The two bay doors are also contributing features. Though many original doors were folding or sliding doors, they were often replaced with segmented doors guided by wheels, which is present at White's Service Station. Furthermore, the Pure Oil sign located on the property represents the need for filling stations to distinguish themselves as places of business rather than just another building.

Bathrooms are located at the back of the filling station, accessible only through an exterior door, a feature common in filling stations across the nation. Lastly, the presence of 1960's vintage pumps add to the integrity of the site.¹⁴

Though White's Service Station possesses many unique features, preserving the station in the traditional sense would be impractical. Restoration of filling stations is multi-faceted and complicated; not only must one address structural issues but also think about the environmental element when dealing with the pumps and gas tanks. This would entail a large monetary investment, something neither the owner nor Smith County would approve. Adaptive Reuse would also prove improbable, as its location for commercial business is less than desirable and the costs potentially outweighing any gain to be had. The best option is for White's to be preserved through continuous use as a gas station, as this reduces the need to alter the structure to accommodate it to a new use. However, in the author's opinion this method, while the best course of action, may still not be effective in preserving White's in the long run. This family operated business is not immune to the pressures of economy, and without some form of intervention, the loss of this cultural resource may be complete in 20-30 years.

¹⁴ Chad Randl, "The Preservation and Reuse of Historic Gas Stations," <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/46-gas-stations.htm>.

THE ROME FERRY

The Rome Ferry, located on Lebanon Highway in the community of Rome in Smith County near the Rome Access Area, sits on the bank of the Cumberland River underneath Rome Bridge. Overgrown by weeds, covered in graffiti and rusting through in multiple areas, it sits about 25 yards from the waters it plied. From 1843-1992, The Rome Ferry site connected the citizens of Rome with the Beasley's Bend-Dixon Springs area. This cultural resource, nominated to the national register, is an example of a resource affected by the building of U.S. 70N

The Rome Ferry is believed to have been founded on October 10, 1843, the same day when Rome was founded. Edward Parker was listed as the first ferrykeeper in 1850. From there the ownership of the ferry transferred from Parker to Richard C. Nolan in 1859. On May 4, 1862, the Rome Ferry was occupied by General John Hunt Morgan and Confederate forces during the retreat from Lebanon.¹⁵ After the Civil War, The Rome Ferry continued to serve as a gathering/focal point for the Rome Community. By the time road building began in the 1920's, the ferry was serving as a major transportation route in the Rome community. The ferryboat that served during this period was made from yellow poplar and powered by a mule. A circular treadmill was installed on the deck where a blind mule would walk in circles to power the paddle wheel. The Rome Ferry did not remain untouched by the new highway building programs in Tennessee during this time period though. The north landing was relocated 200 yards to the west due to the fact that automobiles could not negotiate the steep slope leading to the ferry.¹⁶

¹⁵ National Register of Historic Places, "Rome Ferry," Rome, Smith County, Tennessee, National Register #86003477, Accessed 11/20/2017, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/86003477>.

¹⁶ National Register of Historic Places, "Rome Ferry," <https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/86003477>.



Figure 25: "The Jere Mitchell ferries two pickup trucks, a car and passengers from one side of the Cumberland River to the other in the 1950s," from Tilly Dillehay, "Remembering Rome Ferry," Wilson Living Magazine, March 18th, 2015, Accessed 11/24/2017, <https://www.wilsonlivingmagazine.com/remembering-rome-ferry/>



Figure 26: "The Jere Mitchell." 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 27: "Jere Mitchell Cabin." 2017. Photo by author.

Excitement once again came to The Rome Ferry during World War II in the form of the Tennessee Maneuvers with the Second Armored Division. The location of the Rome Ferry was ideal for the maneuvers as Middle Tennessee's geography matched those of the Rhine River Valley. Much like other small towns in Middle Tennessee, the maneuvers hold a unique spot in the collective memory of the community. After World War II Smith County bought a 60 foot steel ferry in 1949, which is the one located on the site. The ferryboat was named the *Jere Mitchell* after a local Smith County soldier killed during the invasion of Normandy. A 60 by 30 foot long craft, the *Jere Mitchell* was powered by a six cylinder, 235 horsepower engine. This ferry was owned and operated by Smith County, and transported an average of 50 vehicles a day until it was dragged from the Cumberland River to its current resting place by a bulldozer in 1992.¹⁷

The grounding of the *Jere Mitchell* presents unique problems for the Rome community and its preservation. Before it was grounded, it was only a ten minute trip from Rome to Beasley's Bend on the other side of the river. Now the trip is a 23 mile, 40 minute drive to get to Rome. This spurred some citizens to form The Friends of the Rome Ferry in 2001 with the goal of getting the *Jere Mitchell* back in the river.¹⁸ In an interview with the *Wilson Living Magazine*, Bettye Richardson, one of the founders of The Friends of the Rome Ferry, said that the cost estimate to get the *Jere Mitchell* back in the water during the late 1990's was \$300,000. The cost proved too much for Smith County, and when approached by the county mayor, Richardson said, "We know that it's not gonna run, but the county mayor asked me what could be done down there, and I suggested a little park with picnic benches and that we clean up and paint the ferry

¹⁷ National Register of Historic Places, "Rome Ferry," <https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/86003477>.

¹⁸ Tilly Dillehay, "Remembering Rome Ferry," *Wilson Living Magazine*, March 18th, 2015, Accessed 11/24/2017, <https://www.wilsonlivingmagazine.com/remembering-rome-ferry/>.

and put it on a pedestal with a ramp so that tourists could walk up safely and enjoy it.”¹⁹ As of this writing, none of those requests have been met.

So what is the best way to preserve this cultural resource? John Ruskin might suggest that the best way to preserve the *Jere Mitchell* is to leave it in ruins. Indeed, removing the ferryboat from its current position would rob it of much of its context. However, leaving the ferryboat in its current context is unacceptable in two ways. Firstly, the ferryboat has, in the years since it was grounded in 1992, suffered from cannibalization and exposure to the elements. Graffiti covers much of its surface and several parts of the boat are rusted all the way through. Valuable components of the ferryboat are missing, most notably its bell. Beer cans, old campfire circles, and various other refuse is located around the ferryboat, indicative of its status as a meeting place for local high school kids and other community members alike. As the boat continues to deteriorate, it poses a safety hazard for anyone who climbs on its surface. Furthermore, the ferryboat’s location is susceptible to flooding, of which the area is known for.

Secondly, there are no interpretive signs present at the site of the *Jere Mitchell*. As you descend the road to get to the ferry, there is an interpretive sign for the Morgan’s raid and his retreat across the ferry, but nothing about the ferry itself. Thus a possible solution for preservation follows Richardson’s suggestion. A concrete pad should be poured to get the *Jere Mitchell*’s hull off the ground, critical to stemming the rampant rusting on the bottom of the ferryboat. Smith County maintenance crews should maintain an area of approximately 5 feet around the *Jere Mitchell*, keeping the grass, bushes, and other flora off of the ferry’s hull. This should also stem the deterioration of the resource. Work crews should be assigned to knock the

¹⁹ Tilly Dillehay, “Remembering Rome Ferry,” <https://www.wilsonlivingmagazine.com/remembering-rome-ferry?>.

rust off key structural areas, such as the hull, floor, and cabin and then repaint the ferry. Finally, interpretive markers should be placed near the *Mitchell* to describe its history and importance to the community, with any remaining removable resources moved to the Smith County courthouse. This should be noted on the markers both at the *Mitchell* and the courthouse to encourage visitation to both sites. Without taking preventative measures, the *Mitchell* will continue to deteriorate until it is deemed a safety hazard, at which point it will finally be scrapped and lost to future generations.

THE ROME BRIDGE

Looming over the *Jere Mitchell* is the Dr. James E. Fisher Bridge. Connecting U.S. 70N with the Rome community, this steel truss bridge was built over Round Lick Creek in 1940.²⁰ While the Rome Ferry is a fascinating resource, the Fisher Bridge is representative of the changes that modern engineering wrought upon the landscape and the emphasis placed on high speed travel and commerce. Similar to the Cordell Hull Bridge in appearance, the Fisher Bridge owes its existence to the federally funded bridge projects that took place during the New Deal and beyond. The purpose of these bridges focused not only on bridging communities but in generating revenue both in the affected communities via employment and new business openings as well as interstate commerce. These bridges frequently changed the cultural and economic landscape of the communities they affected. David Calease writes access provide by bridges “stimulated the economy in areas previously difficult for people to access. In some cases, the

²⁰ Tennessee Department of Transportation, Tennessee Highway Bridges, 14 April, 2014, <http://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/tdot/attachments/TennesseeHighwayBridges.pdf>, 798



Figure 28: “Dr. James Fisher Bridge, Rome TN.” 2017 Photo by author.

bridge and related road development created an entire economic transformation of the surrounding area.”²¹

In addition to the economic transformation, the Fisher Bridge also reflected the increasing emphasis on highway transportation over traditional forms of travel. As we saw in the Rome Ferry section, the *Jere Mitchell* served a critical role in connecting the Rome community with those around it. However, with the building of the Fisher Bridge and the accompanying engineered landscape, the *Mitchell* was completely bypassed. Indeed, it is actually located directly below the bridge. This creates a complicated and rich cultural landscape, one that not only encompasses the traditional methods of travel and life that still figure large in some members of the Rome community’s mind, but also the legacy of the New Deal and the values that it sought to communicate through the built form of the bridge.

UNION HEIGHTS SCHOOL & FORKS RIVER SCHOOL

Union Heights School and Forks River School, both located on U.S. 70N, are resources that are representative of the school consolidation movement. Nearly identical in structure and relative location to the highway, both schools provide essential services to their respective communities. The push for rural school reform was not something unique to the New Deal era. As early as 1902 Americans realized that the gap between rural education and city education grew wider with each passing year. J.W. Olsen of the National Education Association wrote in 1902 that “rural school advancement has not kept pace with the wonderful progress in our city schools...due to the natural ultraconservatism of our rural population, to the abandonment for the city and the west of farms in the eastern states, and to conditions inherent in the isolated one-

²¹ David L. Calease, “Economic Impact of Federal Bridge Projects on Tennessee Communities During the Great Depression.” M.A. thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2012, 62.

room schoolhouse itself.”²² It was clear to people like Owens that the one room schoolhouse, a once celebrated institution in the nineteenth-century, could no longer provide effective instructions to its students.²³

It was not just one room schoolhouses that hindered rural education reform. Southern communities were ambivalent towards education. In one room schoolhouses, communities could exercise control what their children learned and the values of the schools themselves.²⁴ Lessons learned by children in these one room schoolhouses were primarily focused on rural needs and would “give children appreciation and practical instruction for life on the farm.”²⁵ This stemmed from a desire to halt, or at least slow, the ongoing trend of migration from farms to cities.

Regardless of the issues faced, reformers believed that the best course of action for rural education reform centered on the idea of the consolidated school. These consolidated schools would replace all of the one room schoolhouses, routing the students attending those schoolhouses to the consolidated schools location. Those in favor of consolidation believed that consolidated schools could provide better teachers, facilities, and instruction because of the larger resource base a consolidated school could wield vs. one room schoolhouses. Tracy Lynn Steffes further discusses the perceived benefits that consolidating could provide, writing “Consolidation was efficient because it eliminated redundancies and replaced small, cheap structures and poor teachers with fewer, higher-quality ones. More importantly, consolidating

²² Tracy Lynn Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 47.

²³ *Ibid*, 49.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 50.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 52.

schools meant consolidating small districts, which enlarge the territory and tax base, thereby spreading out cost and opportunity more widely and equitably.”²⁶

Critical to the success of the consolidation movement was the construction of the highways and the ability to reliably transport students to these new schools. Indeed, the first consolidation efforts that took place at the turn of century hinged on the ability to transport students from their small schools to a larger one in a nearby town or village.²⁷ The location of both Union Heights and Forks River in relation to U.S. 70N suggests that, much like these early consolidation movements, efficient and reliable transportation was critical to their success as well. Furthermore, by interpreting the schools and the highway side by side one can see the interconnectedness between the different New Deal and public work programs that took place in the early to mid-twentieth century.

CORDELL HULL BRIDGE

The Cordell Hull Bridge spans the Cumberland River and connects Carthage with South Carthage. Construction began on the Cordell Hull Bridge in December of 1934 and was completed in May of 1936.²⁸ An impressive steel truss bridge, it was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.²⁹ In 2007 the Tennessee Department of Transportation’s inspection of bridge revealed that there was significant deterioration to the steel truss, spans, and

²⁶ Tracy Steffes, *School, Society, and State*, 67.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 67

²⁸ *Ibid*, 42

²⁹ National Register Form, “Hull, Cordell, Bridge,” Carthage, Smith County, Tennessee, National Register #09000951, Accessed 03/06/2018, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/09000951>.



Figure 29: "Union Heights School, Rock City, TN." 2018. Photo by author.



Figure 30: "Forks River Elementary School, U.S. 70N." 2018. Photo by author.

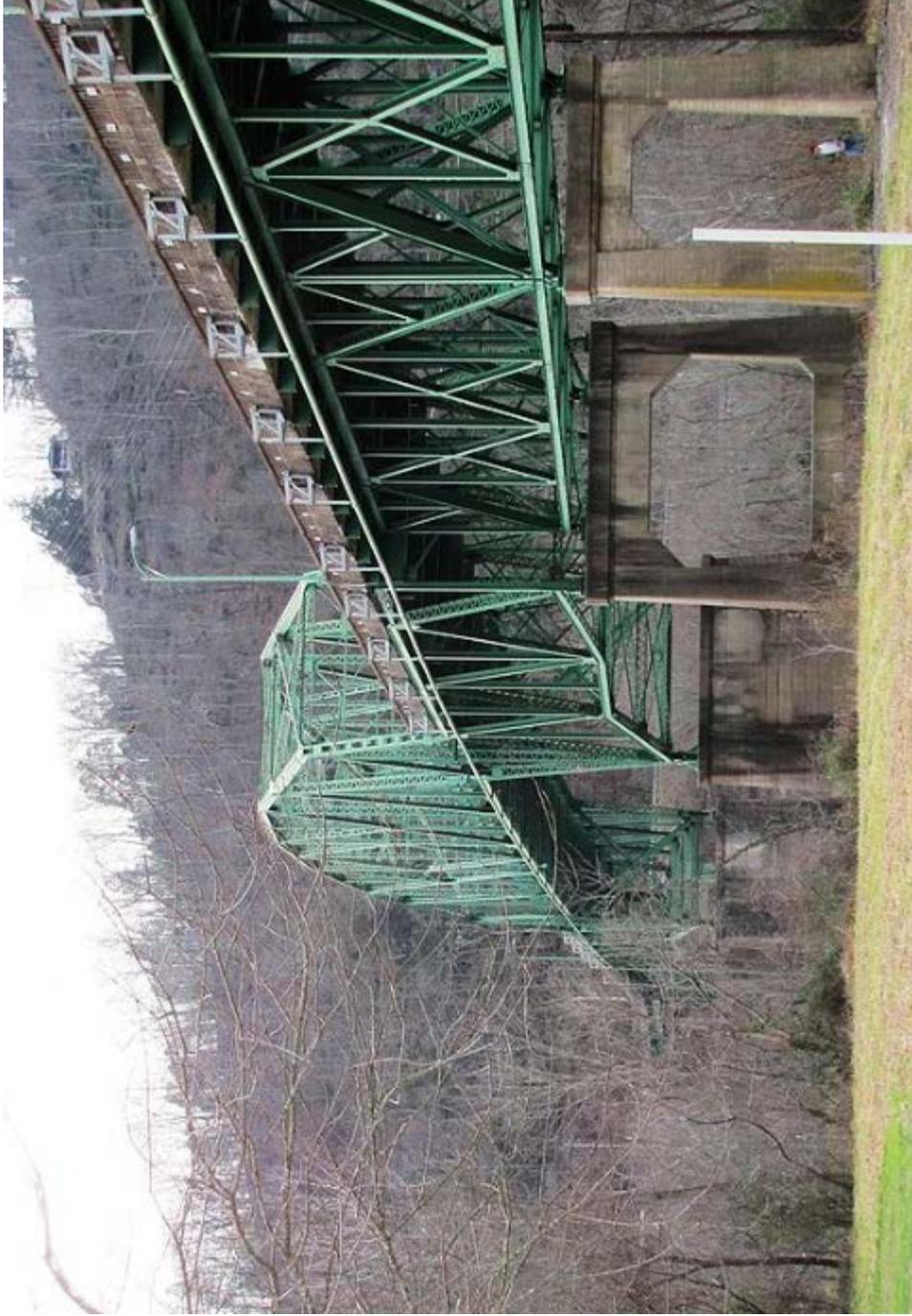


Figure 31: “The Cordell Hull Bridge, spanning the Cumberland River in Carthage, Tennessee, USA. The bridge, built in 1936, was named for U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who once lived in Carthage.” Courtesy of Brian Stansberry

connections.³⁰ Restoration of the bridge by Mid-State Construction Company, led by project manager Nick Davis, began in August of 2011 and was completed in 2014.³¹

The Cordell Hull Bridge began as a National Industrial Recovery Act and Works Progress Administration project. Like many of the projects during the New Deal, the Cordell Hull Bridge sought to both rectify an infrastructural need and stimulate the local economy. The contract for the building of a bridge that would connect highway 24 and 25 was awarded to the Vincennes Bridge Company in 1930.³² Though the Vincennes Bridge Company provide much needed jobs at a time in which unemployment in Smith County rose to over 1,500, the impact only affected a select group, leaving more than 1,000 men out of work.³³ However, those that did manage to find work were paid one-third more than those that worked on the Knoxville bridge.³⁴ David Calease writes “The employment of 150 men from Smith County would put money in the pockets of men who would have otherwise been looking for handouts.”³⁵

GENTRY SCHOOL

Gentry School is located in Putnam County directly off the highway. The building itself is a single story brick structure and currently serves as the Gentry Community Center, a great example of adaptive reuse. Gentry School was one of two rural schools built in Putnam County by the Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) in 1934 during the New Deal. Both

³⁰ Tilly Dillehay, “Carthage heralds makeover of Cordell Hull Bridge,” *Wilson Living Magazine*, August 4, 2014, Accessed 03/06/2018, <https://www.wilsonlivingmagazine.com/carthage-heralds-makeover-of-cordell-hull-bridge/>.

³¹ Staff Reports, “Cordell Hull Bridge re-opens in Smith County,” *Lebanon Democrat*, July 9, 2014, Accessed 03/06/2018, <http://www.lebanondemocrat.com/frontpage/2014/07/09/Cordell-Hull-Bridge-re-opens-in-Smith-County>.

³² David Calease, “Economic Impact of Federal Bridge Projects,” 39.

³³ *Ibid*, 40.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 40.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 41.

Gentry School and its sister school at Double Springs were built for ninety-five hundred dollars.³⁶

Gentry School is representative of the vision that New Dealers had for Tennessee. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the goal of the New Deal was not only to generate money and income through public infrastructure projects but to “reform” and correct the backwardness of the people in Tennessee. The construction of schools it could be argued were the most solid representations of this vision. These schools contained modern amenities and served to consolidate education under one roof; gone were the one room schoolhouses and unstandardized education that had been the common mode of education in Tennessee. The construction of the schools, like many different aspects of the New Deal, were received with mixed views. However, Gentry School and other New Deal programs in Putnam County are attributed to improving the education and quality of life in the area. Dr. Carrol Van West in *New Deal Landscapes* quotes historian Mary J. Delozier as saying, “New Deal programs improved education in Putnam county. The NYA trained approximately two thousand high school students in construction, carpentry, metalworking, secretarial skills, and economics. Other agencies hired unemployed teachers to organize public school music and recreation programs, initiated night classes for CCC enlistees and other adults.”³⁷

CONCLUSION: A NEW DEAL LANDSCAPE

When travelling from Lebanon to Carthage and beyond on U.S. 70N, it may be easy to conclude that there is nothing special about the highway beyond the scenic views. Indeed, very few would deem U.S. 70N a significant route. Yet upon closer examination, U.S. 70N is a

³⁶ Carrol Van West, *New Deal Landscapes*, 119.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 119-120.



Figure 32: "Gentry School, Putnam County, TN." 2018. Photo by author.



Figure 33: "Gentry School Dedication Plaque." 2018. Photo by author.

fascinating and complex New Deal landscape. The highway itself was a New Deal project. Whereas previous routes once accommodated traditional communities like Bellwood, twisting and turning across the countryside, U.S. 70N bypasses these detours, forging a straight path between Lebanon and Carthage. New Deal values of efficiency and renewal are reflected in this no-nonsense route, and the engineered landscape of U.S. 70N embodies the intersection between rural and traditional communities with modern technology. Communities like Rome experienced the effects of modern technologies on traditional landscapes, finding that their communities and traditions were overshadowed and dominated by New Deal public works projects.

The presence of roadside architecture, whether it be White's Service Station or the Hickory Hill Motel, speaks to a prosperity and volume of traffic that accompanied the completion of U.S. 70N's construction. Examination of the Cordell Hull Bridge and the Dr. James Fisher Bridge revealed that the completion of New Deal projects could stimulate local economies and pave the way for new business. The motels serviced travelers on their way to Lebanon, while White's Service Station provided a refueling point for the truckers that traveled this route. Likewise, the state of these roadside architectural features also speak to life after the New Deal. Much of the traffic U.S. 70N was designed for, namely tourists and trucking, has since shifted to travelling on the interstate.

Finally, in addition to the engineered landscape and the presence of roadside architecture, the schools located along this route further contribute to U.S. 70N's status as a New Deal transportation corridor. School consolidation depended upon transportation routes to transport the students from their one room schoolhouses to these new schools. Not only did this highway serve as an engine of economic change, it worked to facilitate the cultural uplift mission New Deal policy makers sought to enact in Tennessee.

CONCLUSION: IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

John Jakle and Keith Sculle in *Motoring: The Highway Experience in America* quote an article from the New Jersey highway department's publicity magazine, *The Highwayman*, published in 1922. The article reads:

I am the motor. I have clipped the wings of Time, and broken through the barriers of Space. I have opened the gates of cities, that those who dwell therein may go as on wings to...open spaces and find again the sun and wind and the stars they had forgot...I have given much, and one thing have I asked—roads. Flowing roads for my spinning wheels; roads to reach into the humble corners, and stretch even to the far places of the earth.¹

Though the article waxes prosaic and is geared towards drumming up support for the building of roads, the importance the author attaches to road building as a vehicle for personal discovery, progress, and rejuvenation are not empty words or a literary flourish. Whether it was those in the heady days of the good roads movement who formed the automobile groups and highway associations that lobbied for better roads, good highway supporters who laid the groundwork for the grand interstate highways that crisscross the nation, or the New Dealers who bent and shaped the landscapes around them for their grand public works projects, they all shared one belief. The belief that roads were agents of change and progress.

Today, roads are viewed with nothing nearing this level of excitement to the general public. Though debates flare up and die down routinely over things like gas tax, toll roads, toll bridges, and road expansion, the rhetoric found in *The Highwayman* and the good roads movement would be considered outlandish in modern discourse. Roads are mundane, a concrete part of life that, without it, our daily routines would not be possible. A report from the AAA

¹ John A. Jakle & Keith Sculle, *Motoring: The Highway Experience In America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 1.

NewsRoom on September 8, 2016 found that American drivers spend more than 17,600 minutes (seven forty hour workweeks) driving each year, travelling an average of 10,900 miles annually. This varies depending on region, with rural drivers travel 13,506 miles annually.² To put this in a historical context, Tennessee in 1920, just two years before the publication of *The Highwayman* article, only had 500 miles of paved roads.³ In a period of less than one hundred years driving and automobiles went from being a luxury to something commonplace. Tennesseans went from only having 500 miles of paved roads to driving over twenty times that amount annually in the same time span.

Thus it might actually come as little wonder that something so intimate and familiar can escape our critical gaze. Yet understanding the history of the roads that we drive and the infrastructure that drives our routines can reveal much about our history and the history around us. A close inspection of Austin Peay's administrations from 1923-1927 reveals that road building has always been a political process that revolves around systems of power and patronage. This political process is important not only to understanding the ways in which public works projects are accomplished, but the environment that created the conditions necessary for those systems of power and patronage to exist. In terms of Peay's administrations, that environment was created by the transition from the good roads movement to the good highway movement. By focusing on highways connecting economic centers with interstate routes rather than a web of farm to market roads, the stakes were raised. Rather than an abstract vision of cultural uplift, the good highway movement highlighted the economic benefit that could come from better roads. Shedding a light on the twin themes of power/patronage and the dialogue

² Tamra Johnson, "Americans Spend an Average of 17,600 Minutes Driving Each Year," AAA, September 8, 2016, Accessed 3/6/2018, <http://newsroom.aaa.com/2016/09/americans-spend-average-17600-minutes-driving-year/>.

³ Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press), 67.

between two competing road ideologies lends us a deeper understanding of our highway system's physical form and character.

Consequently, an examination of the physical form of the highway and the resources along it prove fruitful for understanding our transportation corridors. U.S. 70N, a New Deal highway, highlights the intersection and tensions between modern technologies and traditional landscapes. The physical form of U.S. 70N provides a striking counterpoint to previous routes of travel, abandoning the crooks and bends in favor of straight stretches. In doing so, the effects of modern technologies upon the landscape are writ large, especially upon the village of Rome. Engineered embankments pass over houses, community turn offs are sharp, and the *Jere Mitchell*, an important component of Rome's history, rests in the shadow of a modern bridge.

Yet a study of a different bridge, the Cordell Hull Bridge, reveals that just as these modern technologies could alter traditional landscapes in negative ways, they were frequently incorporated into the existing landscape and served as engines of change. The Cordell Hull Bridge, built as a temporary bridge and funded through the influence of U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull and New Deal funds, provided employment and work for 150 men in Smith County. This bridge has since become a fixture of the community. Indeed, the closing of the bridge due to safety concerns in 2007 caused considerable consternation amongst the population of both Carthage and South Carthage. For some like Smith County historian Sue Maggart Petty, the bridge is the focus of nostalgia. For others like Bill Markham, the bridge was an engine of economic opportunity. With the closing of the bridge, Markham simply locked up his department store on the Carthage square. In an interview with *Wilson Living Magazine*, Markham

commented that when the bridge closed down for restoration, “it closed about everything.”⁴ Eventually it was decided that this New Deal bridge was an irreplaceable part of Carthage’s cultural landscape, resulting in approximately \$9.5 million dollars spent in restoring a bridge that only cost \$199,083 in 1936.⁵

Connecting all of these resources are the underlying tenants of the New Deal; that of cultural uplift and economic rejuvenation to combat the Great Depression. Whether it was consolidated schools, highways, bridges, or dams, each one cannot be separated from the larger New Deal context. Viewing U.S. 70N as a New Deal corridor then reveals a sense of continuity with both the good roads movement and the good highway movement. Not only could New Deal highways and projects potentially fulfill social and cultural needs, they could also serve economic interests.

Finally, the examination of non-New Deal resources flesh out circumstances surrounding the construction of the highways and the impact of future public works project, such as the interstate, on these existing corridors. Rest View Cemetery confronts the reality that New Deal projects, such as highway building, could be utilized to further isolate African American communities. The Edsel Floyd Bridge in Watertown, Tennessee is illustrative of Stilgoe’s metropolitan corridors and the hierarchies that were part and parcel of highway building. Lastly, the presence of roadside architecture, like White’s Filling Station, the Hickory Hill Motel, and the L-Rancho Motel serve not only as indicators of U.S. 70N’s prosperity as a result of New Deal programs but the drop in use that accompanied the building of the interstate.

⁴ Tilly Dillehay, “Carthage heralds makeover of Cordell Hull Bridge,” *Wilson Living Magazine*, August 4, 2014, Accessed 03/06/2018, <https://www.wilsonlivingmagazine.com/carthage-heralds-makeover-of-cordell-hull-bridge/>.

⁵ Ibid.

This study, in addition to addressing a historiographical gap of transportation history in Tennessee, seeks to bring a critical gaze to our roadways and their resources. Educator and historian Lucy Maynard Salmon published an essay titled “History in a Backyard” in 1912. In this article Salmon argues that history is not restricted to grand politics, exotic locations, or spectacular buildings and artifacts. Instead, history can be found in one’s own backyard; the rustic fence that borders the property is representative of the question of land ownership, and a closer investigation of the flower bed reveals “mythology blossoms in our bulbs.”⁶ Salmon’s article reveals that the extraordinary is often disguised as the ordinary and that the average, every-day objects in our lives can, with close analysis, shed light on our past and reveal continuities and change between the past and our everyday lives. History then is not an abstract concept or located only in grand, far-away places; it is in our backyard, waiting for us to discover it. By returning a critical gaze to the common and mundane, like our roadways across our nation, we can uncover the stories that are waiting to be told.

⁶ Lucy Maynard Salmon, “History In a Backyard, (1912), in Nicholas Adams and Bonnie G. Smith, eds., *History and the Texture of Modern Life: Selected Essays of Lucy Maynard Salmon* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 83.

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