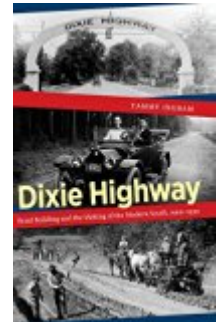


Tammy Ingram. *Dixie Highway: Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-1298-0.



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Commissioned by K. Stephen Prince (University of South Florida)

In 1914, Carl Fisher proposed to build the first connected system of roads linking North and South. A century later, Tammy Ingram has written the first scholarly book on that highway. *Dixie Highway: Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930* tells the story of Fisher, the Good Roads Movement, town boosters, chain gangs, and more.

Before the early twentieth century, roads in the South were entirely local, in terms of both construction and use. Outside towns and cities, “bad roads” were a part of everyday life for many. The Good Roads Movement, which began in the late nineteenth century, was one of the foundations of southern progressivism. In order to help farmers get their crops to market, the movement emphasized building or improving roads from towns out into neighboring farming areas—a spokes-on-a-wheel pattern. Only with the popularization of the automobile in the early twentieth century and the corresponding zeal of entrepreneurs like Fisher and the ubiquitous town

boosters did the movement’s emphasis change from roads *into* town to roads *between* towns.

In 1914, a year after the opening of his New-York-to-San-Francisco Lincoln Highway, Fisher and others engineered the formation of the Dixie Highway Association, consisting of the governors in the states between Chicago and Miami. The goal of the proposed Dixie Highway was not to build a new road, but rather to link existing roads into a new multistate highway that would make North-South long-distance automobile travel feasible. One of the association’s first tasks was to come up with a precise route. Local leaders in the designated states immediately began arguing for the advantage of a route that would pass through their towns. For example, in Georgia, the state that provides the focal point for much of Ingram’s analysis, there was keen competition between Rome and Dalton for the highway between Chattanooga and Atlanta. On the other side of Atlanta, a similar competition existed between Jonesboro and McDonough. The solution was a highway with multiple routes, one that went through both

Rome and Dalton, both Jonesboro and McDonough, and so forth.

Ingram's *Dixie Highway* will remind many readers of Howard Lawrence Preston's pioneering *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (1991). Preston's study was broader (the Dixie Highway was just a small part of his story) and emphasized cultural modernization rather than the politics of road building. Where the two books overlap, the main difference is one of perspective on the nature of reform in the Good Road Movement (and another entry in the "Who were the Progressives?" debate). Early movement advocates worked in the tradition of the Populists for the good of farmers and for the prosperity of the rural and small-town South. By the 1910s, movement leaders were often men like Carl Fisher, who built Miami Beach, or Leonard Tufts, who developed the Pinehurst resort in North Carolina: men who wanted to make the South more commercial and cosmopolitan for the good of real estate development, tourism, and economic growth. Preston bemoans that these "highway progressives" (as he called the second wave of road reformers) hijacked the movement for their own interests: "Once this happened, good roads lost their significance as a reform issue" (p. 5).

Ingram looks at the situation from a more pragmatic standpoint: Progressive campaigns often united diverse groups with different interests, and in any case, without the involvement of town boosters and businessmen, most of these highway projects would never have succeeded. Ingram's biggest achievement in this book is her discussion of the politics behind road building—the interplay of county, state, and federal governments; urban and rural interests; agricultural and commercial concerns; automobiles and bicycles, trucks and railroads; North and South, East and West; big-government and small-government advocates; gasoline taxes and bond issues; and more. Many readers will find her chapter on the use of the

chain gang—a way of dealing with the twin problems of "bad men and bad roads" while maintaining local control of both—especially interesting (p. 134).

"In the Dixie Highway's brief lifetime," Ingram writes, "road construction passed from the sole jurisdiction of local officials into the hands of state and federal highway experts," and this is really the theme of the book (p. 2). The first federal highway funding legislation was signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson, a champion of good roads, in 1916. It provided \$75 million in matching funds to states for post roads (for transportation of the mail) and required all participating states to have a highway department (many southern states still did not). While the act was of limited usefulness to highway programs, it "was an unprecedented demonstration of federal support for road building" (p. 89). World War I showed the shortcomings in the nation's transportation systems. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1921 promoted not post roads but highway systems, and the Bureau of Public Roads began to coordinate the designation of state highway systems in every state. The route of the Dixie Highway remained, but now it was U.S. Highway 27 from Chattanooga to Rome, then U.S. 411 to Cartersville, then U.S. 41 to Atlanta, and so forth. The need for the named highways passed, and in the spring of 1927, so did the Dixie Highway Association.

Tammy Ingram's book will disappoint those who expect the kitschy, nostalgic story that many associate with the Dixie Highway. Those who want a solid and well-written discussion of the myriad aspects of road building in the Progressive-Era South, on the other hand, will be delighted.

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