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"THE SECOND NIGHT'S STOP": EFFECTS OF
U.S. HIGHWAY 301, TOURISM, AND INTERSTATE 95
UPON STATESBORO, GEORGIA, 1950 - 1975

David T. Martin



Georgia Southern University
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**"The Second Night's Stop": Effects of U. S. Highway 301,
Tourism, and Interstate 95
upon Statesboro, Georgia, 1950-1975**

by

David T. Martin

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty
of the College of Graduate Studies
At Georgia Southern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department of History

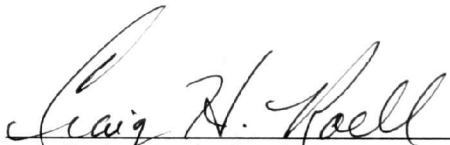
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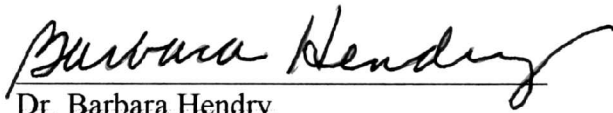
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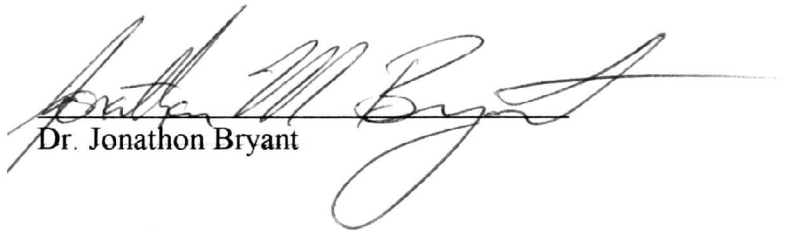
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first of all thank Mrs. Lavinia Strickland and Dr. Barbara Hendry, for, without Mrs. Strickland's gracious interviews I would not have a topic, and without Dr. Hendry's request for help on the Bulloch County Bicentennial Oral History Project, I would not have met Mrs. Strickland. My hope was to put a human face on historical fact and these two individuals, along with my other interview subjects, helped me to accomplish that. Secondly, I must thank my wife Lynda. Frankly, this work would have never seen the light of day without Lynda's constant prodding and everlasting encouragement.

A very large portion of my sources came from many corners of the University system of Georgia and I thank Barbara Strickland and her Inter-Library Loan staff for tracking down my numerous requests for books. Thanks also to Henrietta Royal and the staff of the Statesboro Regional Library for their help with newspaper research. I am also grateful to Carroll Blankenship, Jackie Harrington, Odella Lee, Dr. Del Presley, Leslie Sharpe, Lavinia Strickland, and R. C. Webb for sharing their memories and personal observations with me. This work is stronger with their help.

Deepest thanks to Dr. Craig Roell, my thesis committee chair, for his timely words of encouragement and understanding. He was always glad to see me when I crossed his

doorway and never failed to make this thesis better than I conceived. Similar thanks are given to all of the members of my committee, Dr. Jonathan Bryant and Dr. Hendry, for their careful readings and conscientious criticisms. More thanks to the entire history department faculty who showed interest in my work. I have been treated well here at GSU and I never lacked for enthusiastic comments and support. Thank you all.

My final thanks must go to my family and friends who saw me through this entire project. I dedicate this work to you all--for believing in me. Thanks especially to colleagues Brad Winn--for his many hours of computer advice and timely formatting help --and Cory Andrews, who always kept his eye open for any new bit of news or source that I might find useful.

ABSTRACT

The history of the automobile is a vital part of the history of the twentieth century United States. The automobile began to significantly reshape America following the second World War. The construction of the enormous National Interstate and Defense Highway System assured the dominance of personally-owned automobile as the mode of transportation in the United States. Improved highways made far-flung suburban communities possible and the 41,000 miles of Interstate highway traversing our nation and entering our metropolitan areas assured crowded city streets and time-consuming traffic jams.

What however, has the Interstate system done to the rural areas of our nation? This examination of Statesboro, Georgia gives some insight. The invasion of Interstate 95 down the eastern coastal area of Georgia radically altered the existing traffic and tourism patterns that had slowly developed since the 1920s and rose to its highest levels in the 1950s and 1960s. Statesboro--as its Police shoulder badges attested--was known as the "Tourist City" and relied upon Northeasterners visiting Florida for a significant portion of its yearly income. The main travel artery that carried this traffic before the Interstate system was U. S. Highway 301, which ran through the heart of downtown Statesboro. The Interstate system could have a profound effect upon rural communities, depending

upon where the highway was routed. In Statesboro's case, Interstate 95 was constructed fifty miles away, effectively cutting the community off from the traffic that would use the newer road. The loss of tourist traffic, due to I-95's construction was an additional hardship upon Statesboro.

Statesboro's tourism memory and the reaction to the Interstate are the heart of this work, as well as a look at where Statesboro is today and efforts to revitalize some tourist traffic on the old regional highway. Along the way, the changing world of highway travel will also be examined, paying special attention to the "homogenization" of the roadside experience, from chain restaurants, to impersonal motels, to the death of small towns.

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CHAPTER ONE

A History of Travel Days Gone By

In February 1957, the new editor of the *Bulloch Times* mused about the effects of the Interstate highway building program. He asserted this undertaking would "change the face of the United States . . . and effect virtually every city, village, and countryside. . . . How great the changes will be in our economic and social experiences through this gigantic program is something to be appraised in the years to come."¹ Answering his question, within a local context, is the aim of this work.

Arguably, the automobile has shaped the twentieth-century United States more profoundly than any other major technological innovation to date. It opened up new avenues of growth and leisure to a nation long centered around a localized, rural existence. It spurred the growth of road improvements, road system expansion, and road innovation across the country, affecting every town along the way. The automobile, along with improved roads, gave once relatively isolated farm families access to the growing cities, opening up new vistas of entertainment, education, and consumerism. While

¹J. Shields Kenan, "A Monumental Undertaking," *Bulloch Times*, 28 February 1957, p. 2.

generating many innovations, the automobile set in motion forces that brought many changes to America.

It is this aspect of change that I would like to examine in more detail. As increased motorization swept the country, the nation's road system faced major problems of repair and development. The United States made great strides throughout the first half of the twentieth century to provide a system of roads that suited the transportation needs of a modernizing nation. Interstate highways, sanctioned by the 1956 Federal Highway Act, marked the peak of road systemization for the American motorist, and caused greater changes upon the American culture than any other transportation infrastructure. In examining some aspects of these changes, the questions this thesis wishes to answer are: How did the changing face of the American roadway, and shifting traffic patterns on highways, affect community life along the roads? More specifically, what happened to the Statesboro community along state Highway 301 in eastern Georgia? How did Statesboro benefit from the traffic along this road and what happened as that traffic moved elsewhere?

Several studies consider the impact of the automobile and the creation of the Interstate highway system upon particular regions. James Flink's *The Car Culture* examined the ideals that developed around the car and the men that dominated auto manufacturing. His 1975 book was a starting point for many automobile scholars that followed. Warren J. Belasco described the tourist habits of motoring Americans and the various styles of tourist accommodations following the growth of car ownership in the 1920s in *Americans on the Road* (1979). The psychological culture of the automobile as

symbol and its resultant effects on United States society has also been examined by Flink and by Christopher Finch. Finch's *Highways to Heaven* (1992) described not only the early days of automobile invention in the United States and Europe but also devoted space to the effects of Interstate highway development--especially in Los Angeles (the archetype for the mobilized metropolis), and the tremendously creative yet shortsighted days of Detroit dominance in the 1950s. *Where the Road and the Sky Collide*, by K. T. Berger (1993), demonstrated the automobile's influence upon the design of cities as well as the fact that the automobile has become an indispensable part of everyday life while exerting increasing economic pressures upon the American family. Further, Belasco and John Jakle examined the use of the automobile as a tourist vehicle. Jakle's work, *The Tourist* (1985), has special resonance in this study for its emphasis on the American roadside's loss of uniqueness. He highlights the "homogenization" of the travel experience, which he cleverly termed "placelessness," a concept familiar to anyone who has recently taken a trip on interstate highways. Any Interstate off-ramp around the country offers the same assortment of fast-food restaurants, gasoline stations, lodging, and retail outlets. Regional distinctions have been supplanted by the pervasive power of corporate chains.

All of these works have relevance within the context of my own area of study--Statesboro, Georgia. While most highway impact studies have sought to put the movement within a national context, this work strives to place a human, local face upon the wider national movement--without sacrificing a wider scope when appropriate. In this way, it is hoped, a more immediate understanding of the great forces unleashed by the automobile can be better understood.

Once the automobile came within the price range of the average American family in the 1920s, it began to reshape the cultural landscape. In 1920, for the first time, the Census found that most Americans lived in urban rather than rural areas. The rising automobile mobility (or automobility) of the United States and the obvious enthusiasm that Americans demonstrated for auto travel, created new leisure and economic activities that depended upon the increased travel range that automobiles provided. For example, mass consumerism and mass production--offshoots of growing big business trends, and continuing industrialization--fueled the creation of large department stores located in urban areas. These stores, in turn, received valuable patronage from citizens in the outlying rural regions who traveled to the urban shopping areas in their "Tin Lizzies" along newly improved roads. Conversely, city dwellers now used their automobiles to escape urban, industrial sprawl, to the "unspoiled" countryside as well as to more exotic points of the American continent, traveling with more freedom of choice than rigorous train schedules provided.

Many townsfolk in the United States wished to have improved highways built through their communities. They saw it as an opportunity to draw individuals from the surrounding vicinity towards them, increasing local economy and allowing for greater accessibility. Norman Moline demonstrated this phenomenon by examining the opening of Illinois Route 2 (later U. S. 51) in 1925. The citizens of Oregon, Illinois greeted this north-south route with more enthusiasm than another route that ran east to west from Chicago because the latter road paralleled the railroad lines and the former route made

two previously inaccessible towns more convenient.² However, some reacted negatively to the changing travel habits of townspeople as the greater mobility of the 1920s set in. The local county newspaper lamented that once, "[h]ome filled a bigger place in the minds of the people of those days. People remained in their homes more, used them more freely for recreation." Remaining at home was not due to some local ideology, the article continued, "but because there was less going on elsewhere."³ The automobile created the opportunity to search for activities outside of the home's sphere.

In the South, similar changes were taking place. As the demand for automobiles increased, hard top roads were needed in place of the existing miles of poorly conditioned dirt roadways. The Good Roads movement arose in the South to direct this infrastructure creation. However, the movement split between two camps, one hoping to use new roads to link the South with the nation as a whole and the other hoping to solidify what remained of traditional southern rural life by adapting it to the highway. Historian Howard Preston's 1991 study, *Dirt Roads to Dixie*, examined the particular problems that the automobile caused in the southern region and some of the individuals who helped shape change. For instance, businessman John Asa Rountree was one of the first individuals to take advantage of the previously unexploited business venture of automobile tourism in the South. Rountree shaped the Good Roads movement from a project dedicated to lifting the South "out of the mud" of its extremely primitive road system to a commercial venture

²Norman T. Moline, *Mobility and the Small Town, 1900-1930* (Department of Geography Research Paper Set no. 132, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971), 85-87.

³*Ogle County Reporter*, 13 May 1925, p. 4. In *ibid.*, 100.

that benefitted businessmen and developers.⁴ Rountree and others like him advertised the unspoiled beauty of Florida as a way to lure adventuresome, travel-hungry Northeasterners southward along the improving roadways.

In time, certain roads became major tourist routes through the South. U. S. Highway 301, the focus of this study, was "the major north-south highway serving the eastern United States from Maine to Florida." It stretched a total of 1,107 miles along the eastern coast, connecting Tampa, Florida with New England (see Figs. 1 and 2).⁵ Today Highway 301 runs in relative isolation all along its path northward until it reaches Santee, South Carolina where it first intersects with Interstate 95. Through the Carolinas the old

⁴Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991). Preston devotes a chapter to an examination of the Good Roads movement in general, and particularly emphasizes the differing goals of those Progressives who wanted to integrate the South with the rest of the country via the highways and those "good road" Progressives who wanted improved roads in the South only to stabilize the fleeing of rural dwellers into "dangerous" cities, fearing that highways and increased automobility would weaken the South's agricultural heritage. For a specific examination of the Good Roads movement in one southern state, see Jeanette Keith, "Lift Tennessee Out of the Mud: Ideology and the Good Roads Movement in Tennessee," *Southern Historian* 9 (Spring 1988): 22-37.

⁵Eric Hill Associates, *U. S. 301 Regional Development Study: Effects of the Opening of I-95 on the U. S. 301 Corridor in Georgia and Recommended Action Plan* (Commissioned by the Altamaha Georgia Southern Area Planning and Development Commission, Atlanta: Eric Hill Associates, 1973).

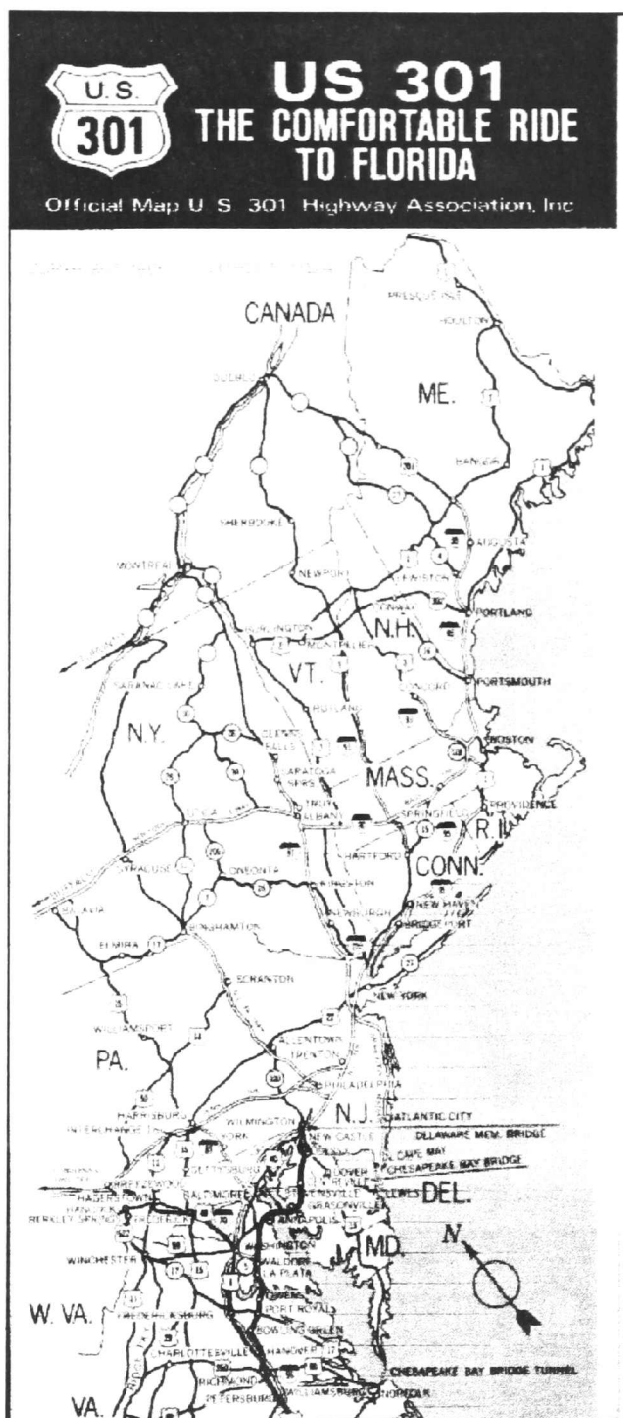


Fig. 1 Official Map, U. S. 301 Highway Assoc., 1965. U. S. Highway 301, "The Comfortable Ride to Florida," began at the Delaware Memorial Bridge at Wilmington. It was a major travel road for North-easterners vacationing in Florida. Courtesy Jackie Harrington.



Fig. 2 Official Map, U. S. 301 Highway Assoc., Inc., 1965. When the I-95 section at Santee, South Carolina was completed in 1975, the Interstate continued closer to the coast. Statesboro was separated from the main flow of tourist traffic. Courtesy of Jackie Harrington.

highway engages in a dance of weaving and joining with the Interstate until it deviates from I-95 in Richmond, Virginia. It then heads in a more easterly direction into Maryland, while the Interstate strikes more directly north. In Maryland, U. S. 301 strikes out through Annapolis and across the Chesapeake Bay, entering Delaware near Middletown and merging with U. S. 40 at Glasgow, heading into Wilmington, where U. S. 301 ends. In the upper east coast beyond Wilmington, the former traffic artery succumbed to the directness and speed of Interstate travel--much as the famed Route 66 did in the Southwest⁶--being completely replaced by I-95.

Statesboro citizens historically benefitted from the streams of tourists flowing down Highway 301 into their town. Such tourism generated many business opportunities--both legal and illegal. Tom Poppell, Darien, Georgia's long-time sheriff, used the tourist trade to solidify his power in McIntosh County by looking the other way when locals set up clip joints and other road-side stands designed to fleece an unwary Northerner looking to experience some "wholesome" southern culture.⁷ Along the Georgia 301 corridor, south of Bulloch County, the community of Ludowici (pronounced like Lew-dough-wissy) gained a notorious reputation of catching travelers in sudden speed traps. But

⁶An enlightening examination of the transformation of Route 66 from road to icon to obscurity is found in Susan Croce Kelly and Quinta Scott's *Route 66: The Highway and its People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

⁷Melissa Fay Greene, *Praying for Sheetrock* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1991), esp. Chapter 5. Darien is located approximately ninety miles from Statesboro on U. S. Highway 17.

many legitimate (if tacky) road-side stands existed as well, along with local restaurants and fruit stands (sometimes offering the bottom of the harvest barrel).⁸

Tourists came south looking for adventure, bringing their money with them. In the early decades of tourist travel, most automobilists camped out in tents pitched nightly. Over time, these activities were viewed with mistrust and the main body of middle-class tourists began spending the night in supervised campgrounds rather than along the roadside. By the 1950s tourists stayed in motels that sprang up alongside the improved highways of the nation.⁹ In such ways the commercialization of the American highway increased, bringing significant changes to American roadside culture.

Before corporate franchising changed roadside businesses in the late 1950s, local businesses benefited from the inflow of travelers and auto tourists, providing gasoline and service stations, as well as restaurants and lodging. These businesses were based within the towns and helped stimulate the local economy. For instance, a local Statesboro restaurant, "Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen," received many years of valuable patronage from East Coast tourists. Opened in 1950, Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen was ready for business just as Highway 301 became the major route through Georgia for the Washington D. C.-to-Florida tourist traffic (see figs.3 and 4). According to Lavinia Strickland, daughter of Mrs. Bryant, "[it] got so busy that they opened the second diner--what we termed the

⁸Ibid., 56-59.

⁹See Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979) for a complete examination of the early days of automobile travel in the United States. Also Jakle, "Motel by the Roadside: America's Room for the Night," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 1(1980): 34-49.

'second dining room.' And within another year they opened the 'party room' or the 'banquet room'. . . ."10

Certainly, the local Statesboro residents helped keep "Mrs. Bryant's" open, but much of its success can be tied to the favorable position that Statesboro held geographically with the highway running through town.

Mrs. Strickland remembers those early days of tourist business well.

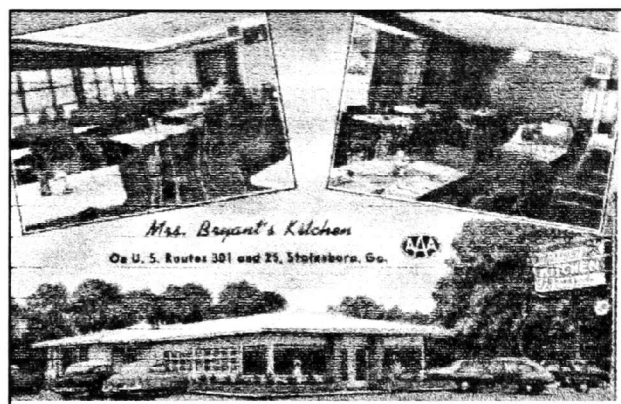


Fig. 3 Postcard, Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen. A favorite stop for hungry tourists, Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen was also well used by locals in Statesboro. Courtesy of Lavinia Strickland.

"Statesboro was the second night's stop on this main traffic route," she said. "It's hard for you kids to remember now, you are so used to the Interstates going anywhere you wanted to go. But at that time you would plan, if you were going to leave Washington [D. C.] and you were going to Florida, you would stop the first night somewhere in South Carolina."¹¹ "Statesboro was in the . . . logical place for the second night's stop. Some would stop in Sylvania, some would stop in Claxton, but the majority of the tourists, it seemed, would stop in Statesboro."¹² Strickland strongly felt that Statesboro benefited

¹⁰Lavinia Bryant Strickland, interview by author, 19 February 1995, tape recording, Bulloch County Oral History Project, Statesboro, Georgia, tape nos. BC33DM and BC34DM. Unless otherwise noted, all interviews were conducted in Statesboro, Georgia.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Lavinia Bryant Strickland, interview by author, 11 December 1996, tape recording with transcript.

and grew economically from this steady flow of travelers. "Why even in the fifties, Statesboro was considered as having more restaurants per capita of people than any other town on the eastern seaboard." The presence of a four-year college helped Statesboro compete with surrounding locales, but tourism made a significant mark on the development of this community.¹³ "[O]f course, with the college build-up it just kept us on growing," Mrs. Strickland realized. "Because of the fact that it was such a logical place to stay, [Statesboro] became a very big tourist town."¹⁴

Tourist travel grew and changed from the earliest days of the 1920s to the halcyon days of Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen. As automobiles became more reliable and sturdier, and as road surfaces steadily improved, vacation trips of longer duration and to more distant destinations became

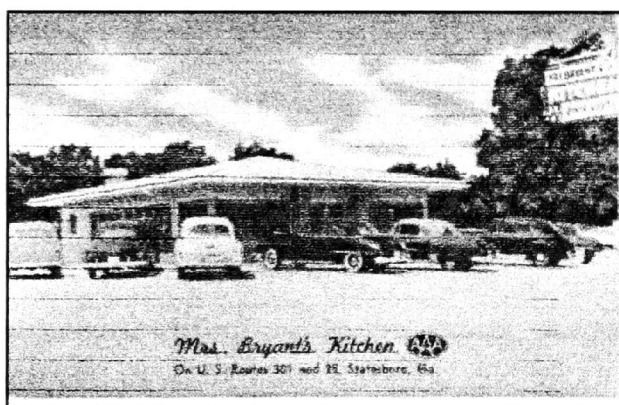


Fig. 4 Postcard, Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen. The automobile encouraged distant vacation trips, bringing in valuable business to Statesboro. Courtesy of Lavinia Strickland.

more common. This vividly contrasts with the early decades of automobile touring, often

¹³Richard Irwin found that in non-metropolitan counties, colleges were the most important factor in county population growth and the presence of Interstate highways the second-most important influence. Irwin discussed this phenomenon in "Non-metropolitan population changes, 1960-1970," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the U. S. Bureau of the Census, Washington D. C., 23 April 1971. Cited in Ke-Shin Wang, "A Longitudinal Examination of the Effect of the Interstate Highway on the Economic and Demographic Growth within Nonmetropolitan Counties in the State of Georgia, 1960-1980" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1987), 17-18.

¹⁴Strickland, 1995 interview.

called "auto-camping" because of the large amounts of equipment that travelers carried and the decidedly rustic accommodations they necessarily utilized. Auto campers traveled the nation's roads near the turn of the twentieth century in their rough-and-tumble, no frills Model T's--loaded down with repair equipment and camping gear, ready for any emergency. When the day was waning, travelers found a suitable resting place, pulled over and set up camp. Food was cooked over an open fire while a tent was attached to the side of the car, creating a make-shift lean-to for the night. These early tourists did not have a specific destination as such. They simply reveled in the experience of traveling the American roadways in complete freedom--a kind of motorized vagabonding.¹⁵ Even thirty years later an auto traveler might take great cares to prepare his vehicle the day before a trip began: ". . . all good tourists have their vehicles properly checked to reduce to a minimum the possibilities of mechanical mishaps, we had our car checked--brakes, steering gear, tires, battery inspected and tested. . . . Then to the service station for gas, oil, windshield cleaning, water, and a road map."¹⁶ Even in the 1950s, auto travel was planned more seriously than it is today.

By no small coincidence, within a couple of decades of Frederick Jackson Turner posited his "Frontier thesis" concerning the nature of the distinctive American character, auto-camping became a popular way for middle- and upper-class Americans to return to the frontier roots of their ancestors. With, however, the closing of the frontier in 1890 and Turner's first advance of his thesis in 1893, some worried that Americans might soften

¹⁵Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, ch. 5.

¹⁶Leodel Coleman, "Editor's Uneasy Chair," *Bulloch Herald*, 8 June 1950, p. 2.

due to lack of struggle.¹⁷ While the automobile could not toughen Americans as pioneering might have done, the mobility it provided excited travelers. Embracing the freedom of auto travel--hitting the open road--was a liberating experience for a modernizing America.¹⁸ Men, and increasing numbers of women as well, saw the automobile as a sort of mechanical savior: "The auto has restored the romance of travel," wrote Edith Warton in 1908. "Freeing us from all the compulsions and contacts of the railway, the bondage to fixed hours and the beaten track . . . [the auto] has given us back the wonder, the adventure, and the novelty which enlivened the way of our posting grandparents."¹⁹

The automobile also provided a chance to experience the country, giving families the opportunity to experience the landscape rather than only read about these places. Frederick Van de Water felt this heady rush of optimism as he recalled his family's trip to San Francisco in the 1920s: "America no longer [was] an abstract noun, or a familiar map of patchwork, or a flag, or a great domed building in Washington. It is something clearer.

¹⁷Turner first presented his paper at the 1893 American Historical Association meeting in Chicago. The closing date of the frontier came in his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1921), 1.

¹⁸See Peter J. Ling, *America and the Automobile: Technology, Reform, and Social Change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

¹⁹Although Warton's experience was motoring in France, her description reflects the American concept of auto travel perfectly. See Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 24.

... It is the road we traveled."²⁰ Similarly, the frequent perils of the roadside presented more opportunities for Americans to meet under their new-found love of automobiles. As one participant put it in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1913: "One traveler helped a fellow motorist solve an engine problem. Soon a group assembled. . . . One was a doctor from California, another a steel executive from Pittsburgh, another a retired merchant from Kalamazoo. One was a young man from Boston, 'who, until he took to motoring, never dreamed of speaking to anyone not properly presented!'"²¹ The car brought about changes in social life.

Auto-campers embraced the hardships of nature in the years before World War I, but in the post-war period, as the composition of the American population shifted and as automobile ownership ceased to be solely the domain of the wealthy, attitudes about automobile tourists changed. The United States, in reaction to the disheartening carnage in Europe and the failed idealism of the peace negotiations, turned inward and focused on itself and its prosperity. The flow of European immigrants was seen as an unfortunate turn of events rather than a source of strength and pride. Consequently, immigrants that already lived in the United States were generally viewed with vague misgivings. This concern, along with a steady drop in automobile prices and the willingness of newly-arrived immigrants to travel across country in search of work, caused middle-class tourists

²⁰*The Family Flivvers to Frisco* (New York: Appleton, 1927), 9. In John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 7.

²¹Ralph D. Paine, "Discovering America by Motor," *Scribner's Magazine* 53 (February 1913): 144.

to cease being as friendly with every motorist encountered along the roadway. Under this new class-based dynamic, automobile vagabonds no longer represented a jaunty image of adventure, but one of a motorized gypsy--constantly moving in search of work. The more well-to-do tourists began shunning the rustic auto-camps of the pre-war years in favor of professionally run areas that charged fees, and eventually, choosing the option offered by the developing motel industry.²²

As this shift from rustic camping to organized lodging occurred, the American roadside began its metamorphosis from locally-owned, personalized travel services to the more impersonal and routine accommodations found along today's highways. Emily Post noticed the first stirrings of this change in a work she published chronicling a motor trip she undertook in 1916: "You arrive at night and leave early in the morning and all you see is one street driving in and another going out, and a lobby, dining-room, and a bedroom or two at the hotel."²³ Hoping to create a more inviting atmosphere for tourists, in June 1953, Statesboro business leaders joined the national Highway 301 Association, composed of local leaders in each of the states through which the highway passed. Realizing that the tourist business was a form of industry liable to regulation, this roadside association acted as a booster club or a nascent tourist bureau.

These men were well aware that an unfavorable experience in Statesboro could cost local businesses money not only then but in the future as well. One traveler said it

²²Belasco, *Americans on the Road*. Chapter Five gives an excellent account of this shift in attitude.

²³Emily Post, *By Motor to the Golden Gate* (New York: Appleton, 1916), 52. In Jakle, *The Tourist*, 254-55.

well: "If at your leading hotel he badly was bedded and poorly baited he will remember your town forever as a spot to be cursed and avoided."²⁴ Local Statesboro businesses lived by the same rules, encouraging friendly service within the city and at the same time, warning travelers to avoid towns further along the highway. Thus, some communities such as Darien and Ludowici gained reputations for speed traps, gambling, and clip joints. The latter's traffic practices caused very large headaches for the other towns along the highway, and the 301 Association was vigilant in its attempts to divert traffic from that community. Lavinia Strickland was warned never to stop there by her father--a member of the Statesboro local chapter. "I remember very clearly," Mrs. Strickland recalled, "my daddy telling me that if I had a flat [tire] or if my car broke down anywhere in that area of Ludowici, I was to walk to Jesup. I was not to stop anywhere along there because they hated him so bad."²⁵ Yet, even as the local highway association strove to attract tourist business, changes took place that ironically succeeded in pushing them away.

Following World War II there was another major shift in tourist practices and both the nature of the roadway and the traveler's use of it resulted in a restructuring of local communities along the main tourist routes. Construction of Interstate highways began in the early 1960s, emphasizing long-distance trips between cities along routes abreast of, but separated from, towns and local businesses. Once, travelers had leisurely motored down the coast, enjoying the distinctive regional cultures and local establishments of the nation. Once, it was not unusual for some to assert that "a good meal in an interesting

²⁴Irvin Cobb, *Some United States* (New York: Doran, 1926), 38. In *ibid.*, 255.

²⁵Strickland, 1995 interview.

restaurant could fix a town firmly in a tourist's memory."²⁶ But increasingly in post-war America, travel was more about speed and destinations, utilizing new road surfaces and dependable, durable, more powerfully motorized cars. For instance, advertisements for the 1955 Pontiac boasted the "Sensational Strato-Streak Rocket V-8" and the 1955 Ford offered "Trigger-Torque 'Go' Power."²⁷ In this era of travel, one might make a comment similar to a prophetic editorial of the 1920s: "We pick out some distant point for the sources of our pleasure and then race toward it, and if our automobile works well and the highway is not too congested, we come back and proudly boast that we made our goal in twenty minutes less than the required time."²⁸ This mind-set has become so ingrained that it is now a stock characteristic for most television sit-com dads.

The changing roadside caused changes in automobile services as well. Once, local service stations, motels, and restaurants served the needs of motorists, but the isolated nature of the Interstate caused a shift away from towns to the remote interchange areas alongside exit ramps. "The activities and sense of life accumulated along the margins of the old towns was absent," observes the geographer John Jakle. "The new roads cut boldly across the established grain of things, and there was little to see on a freeway except the

²⁶Jakle, *The Tourist*, 168.

²⁷Advertising information furnished by Dr. Craig Roell, 4 April 1996. Christopher Finch's *Highway to Heaven: The AUTO Biography of America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) also offers an entertaining narrative to those headstrong days of Detroit iron.

²⁸*Ogle County Reporter*, 30 July 1925, p. 4. In Moline, *Mobility*, 100.

monotony of the road itself."²⁹ Eventually the driver lost connection to the landscape and turned inward, ignoring the towns that had once been points of surcease along the way, but were now only distant areas flung along the off-ramp of an expressway. These towns increasingly served merely as a sort of mile marker, an indication of the distance traveled and the remainder left to go.

The automobile made its mark within the towns and cities as well. The wider travel range that modern cars offered created more choices to drivers once dependant upon local services. As a result, the locally-owned merchandise stores either closed down due to greater selection elsewhere or were forced to limit their sales to one or two specialty items, further devaluing their already precarious economic position. In modest and large cities alike, corporate department stores began moving out of the downtown areas, buying cheap land on city outskirts that provided ample room for massive parking lots. A store owner in downtown Atlanta was forced to close his doors because "[t]raffic got so congested that the only hope was to keep it going. Hundreds used to stop [in downtown merchant areas]; now thousands pass. Five Points has become a thoroughfare, instead of a center."³⁰

As freeways moved away from the centers of towns, commercial strips on the outskirts gained more economic worth. These strips developed along the road-edges of small towns that linked to the expressway. In the 1960s and 1970s local businesses were pushed out by corporate interests that created national chains of motels, restaurants, and

²⁹Jakle, *The Tourist*, 190.

³⁰James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge, MS: The MIT Press, 1975), 178.

gasoline stations.³¹ The spread of commercial strips and nationwide chains of services acted to dilute the regional differences that travelers had once treasured and sought. As small businesses succumbed to the might of national corporate ventures, and as speed and destination replaced notions of travel adventure, local charm was increasingly devalued and less sought out; isolated towns slowly withered due to the immense efficiency of the modern Interstate system. Jakle states, "[i]t was a standardized world thousands of miles long, which constantly intersected itself. At every point, travelers found the same cigarettes, the same breakfast foods, the same radio and television programs, the same topics of conversation."³² The outspoken antebellum senator John C. Calhoun had once hoped that the national highways would unite his country into a single nation--lessening the sectional differences that so often plagued it. Ironically, the highways certainly did unite this nation, but also helped dilute a vibrant part of its character as well.

The construction of modern Interstate highway systems in the 1960s and 1970s increased and solidified the move towards impersonal travel that began in the late 1920s. The majority of tourists no longer hopped from town to town, planning a daily schedule of stops at old familiar waterholes. Instead they raced along the transportation lanes, oblivious to the communities left behind. Travelers, encased in their speedy automobiles, hovered within the faceless world of commercial roadside strips, ignoring the towns that still existed just down the road. Lavinia Strickland remembers the days when an individual

³¹Ibid., 191. For more information on the development of gasoline stations see John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

³²Jakle, *The Tourist*, 192.

could drive through Statesboro and never see a local license plate. "I mean up and down South Main [Highway 301] you'd never see a local tag. The reason was because [the locals] knew to use Zetterower and College [Avenues]. But everything that went through Statesboro [on 301] were tourists. . . ." ³³

Much of those days are gone now in Statesboro. Its university, Georgia Southern, has become the major industry and certainly has helped keep Statesboro from the fates of so many communities that stand along the edges of Highway 301, where abandoned motels and businesses stand like headstones, marking the presence of former towns. There has been a change in an aspect of the American culture because of the Interstate freeways. John Steinbeck captured that change succinctly: "When we get thruways across the whole country, as we will and must, it will be possible to drive from New York to California without seeing a thing." ³⁴ Steinbeck was right, but for the wrong reason. Travelers had not lost the ability to see anything--there just no longer existed anything for them to see.

³³Strickland, 1995 interview.

³⁴*Travels with Charley in Search of America* (New York: Bantam, 1962), 89. In Jakle, *The Tourist*, 190.

CHAPTER TWO

The Tourist Boom Years

"Tourists started coming down, and one of the early . . . nicknames of Statesboro was the Tourist City," remembers Dr. Del Presley, director of the Georgia Southern University museum. "Statesboro saw itself as a tourist hub," he continued, "a logical place for people to stop on their way from the north to Florida. That's what this [area of Eastern Georgia] was, the Florida corridor, the Florida trail, the Florida road. I think [Highway] 301 was extremely important in that regard because it allowed Statesboro to develop a new kind of industry, a serviced [sic] industry to take care of the tourists."¹ During the 1950s, Statesboro experienced the height of its tourist boom via U. S. Highway 301. Americans were enthusiastically taking to the road, testing out Detroit's newest automobile creations and seeing America through their windshields during the postwar economic expansion. A great many of those travelers living on the Eastern seaboard headed south to the balmy, semi-tropical climate of Florida, passing through Georgia on their way (or on their return trip north). Highway 301 was the popular travel artery in those pre-Interstate days and Statesboro was a favorable second day stop south of the nation's capital.

¹Delma E. Presley, interview by author, tape recording with transcript, 29 October 1996.

Many business leaders and citizens of Statesboro recognized the importance of tourist traffic and the potential money that was generated from vacationers who migrated primarily during the spring and summer months. An impact study conducted as Interstate 95 neared completion summarized the past importance of Highway 301 in this way: "Along the route have clustered hundreds of businesses which now depend upon the highway for their economic support and life. . . . A significant portion of the private investments made in the region during the past [twenty] years [1950-1973] were made in businesses along the highway."²

Statesboro newspapers often featured news stories and letters that targeted the impact of tourism along Highway 301. For instance, a gentleman from Massachusetts was passing through Georgia on his way home from Florida and experienced car trouble in Statesboro. He wrote to the Bulloch County Chamber of Commerce, detailing his experiences in town. He described the Statesboro citizens as "co-operative and willing to help others."³ His car was quickly repaired at a fair price and he was back on his way again. It would have been easy for a local mechanic to take advantage of a stranger from so far away, obviously without another option and anxious to get back on the road. However, many citizens of Statesboro recognized the value of a good reputation for a town situated on a major tourist route. This sort of word-of-mouth public relations was a

²Eric Hill Associates, *U. S. 301 Regional Development Study* (Commissioned by the Altamaha Georgia Southern Area Planning and Development Commission, Atlanta: Eric Hill Associates), i.

³"Visiting Stranger Expresses Approval," *Bulloch Times*, 2 March 1950, p. 1.

valuable resource for a town encouraging strangers to pause a while en route to a distant destination.

There were, nevertheless, some townsfolk who questioned the precise value that tourists passing through--with thoughts of other locales in their minds--actually had in Statesboro. D. B. Turner, long-time editor of the *Bulloch Times*, addressed that question after looking out his downtown office window one spring day and observing the great traffic lines caused by tourists passing by the courthouse. A *Times* article suggested providing more space downtown for local citizens shopping, believing that, "Statesboro's greatest obligation is to providing street space--parking space, if you please, for the neighbors who everyday in the year are prospective patrons of our [downtown] business concerns." Of course, additional parking downtown would further slow Main Street's [301's route through town] traffic flow. So the *Times* editorial continued, "If anybody must be shunted off, let swift passage be provided for those who only want to pass. They will like those speedings-up." The article closed with an observation that was not often heard in the heady days of the 1950s tourist boom: "[T]he cash benefits from passing tourists are extremely small as compared to the public agitation of the tourist traffic."⁴ Nevertheless, this cautionary view was surprisingly rare in Statesboro, which frequently experienced traffic backups near the courthouse area, then the main shopping area.⁵

⁴"What Value Tourists?" *Bulloch Times*, 20 April 1950, p. 4.

⁵A survey in 1960 demonstrated the amount of money invested in the tourist industry during the past decade. \$5,797,000 were invested in seventy-three tourist facilities, including restaurants, motels, and service-stations. Tourism generated a gross income of \$6,607,300 annually. From "Tourist Industry is 'Big Industry' Here," *Bulloch Herald*, 20 October 1960, p. 1.

Another editorial featured in the *Bulloch Times* spotlighted additional pressures and problems of heavy traffic through the small Georgia town. The story recounts a trip to nearby Claxton, where "seventy-odd" cars were counted within a ten-mile strip of Highway 301. When the observer returned to Statesboro, "not one car had stopped for even a postage stamp, so far as was apparent on the streets--they had shot straight through with merely 'Thanks! Goodbye!'" This concerned citizen, however, did see some economic benefit to the citizens of Statesboro--albeit an unfortunate side effect:

The ambulance whizzes out Savannah Avenue at more or less frequent intervals and the story comes that somebody has been carried to the hospital or the undertaker's parlor. The County hospital gets some important 'cash'; the good doctors rake in a few coins for pills; the blood bank calls for replenishment, and then the people hear about the need. The taxis and the departing buses get their small rake-off and the automobile repairmen smile--all because tourists are able to come and go.⁶

Yet much more often, local entrepreneurs worked to further develop the tourist presence in Statesboro in any way possible. The most obvious avenues of success were developing tourist-oriented businesses like motels, motor courts, restaurants, and auto service centers. While the former were aimed at mobile visitors, the latter two enterprises were also beneficial to the local townspeople--even though some of these establishments gained a fair degree of fame from visitors outside of Bulloch County.

⁶"Cotton and Tourists," *Bulloch Times*, 12 April 1951, p. 4.

Lavinia Strickland recalled a time when her parents' restaurant, "Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen," had achieved a far-flung reputation due to visitors traveling through Statesboro: Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen gained such a reputation for being a good place to eat [that] I laughing[ly] say we were known all over the world. . . . When [my parents and I] were in California we stopped in some restaurant to eat and somehow the conversation came up and someone said, "Oh yes, I know where Statesboro is, that's where Mrs. Bryant has her restaurant." You stopped in New Orleans it was the same thing. Just about everywhere we went, someone had heard of Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen.⁷

On another occasion, Mrs. Strickland was living in London with her husband and struck up a conversation with some fellow Americans shopping in a department store. When asked where she lived in the States, Mrs. Strickland answered Statesboro, Georgia, and was surprised to hear the couple exclaim, "Oh! Statesboro, Georgia! That's where Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen is!" Mrs. Strickland, who also claims that the Reverend Billy Graham responded in similar fashion when he heard the name of Statesboro, mused that "[the restaurant] probably had more people that knew about it than anyone in Statesboro itself will ever realize."⁸

U. S. District Court Judge B. Avant Edenfield certainly agreed with Mrs. Strickland's assessment of the restaurant. Recalling the trips he made in the eastern U. S.

⁷Lavinia Bryant Strickland, interview by author, 19 February 1995, tape recording, Bulloch County Bicentennial Oral History Project, Statesboro, Georgia, tape nos. BC33DM and BC34DM.

⁸Ibid.

as a young lawyer, Edenfield declared that Mrs. Bryant's "enjoyed an unequalled reputation" among 301 tourists. When speaking to others, his accent identified him as a southerner and when people discovered he was a Georgian, they often remarked of travelling Highway 301 to Florida. "Just as frequently, they would only remember one town, that being Ludowici, and one restaurant, Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen," he recalled. "They were universally complementary of the latter and critical of the former, [because of its notorious speed trap]."⁹

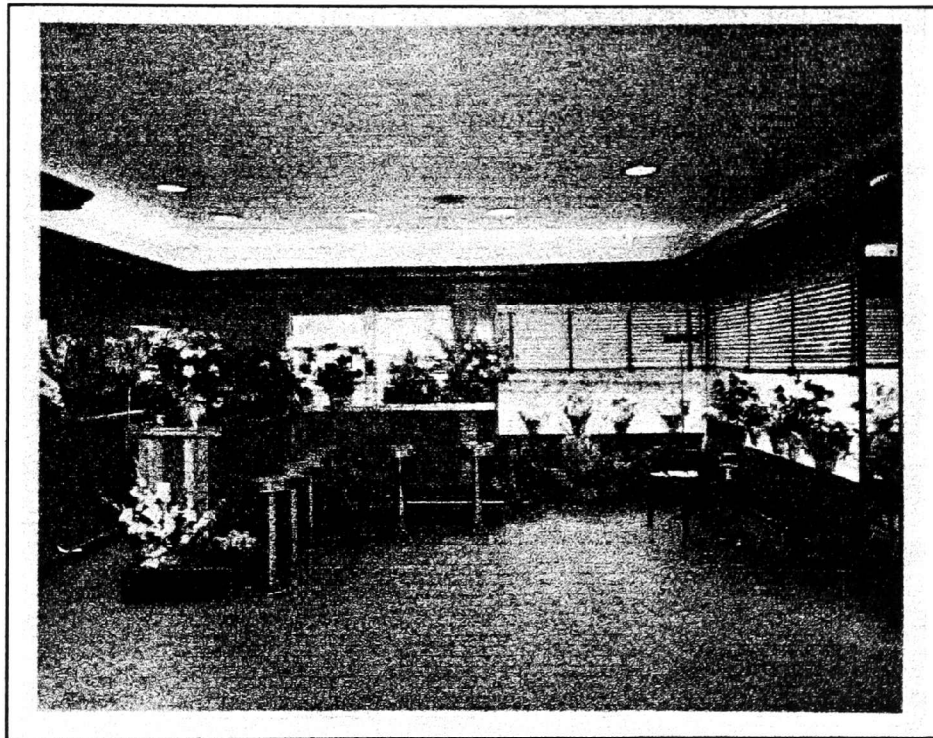


Fig. 5 Interior View, Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen. When Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen opened in 1950, the owners received eighty floral arrangements from local well-wishers. Photo courtesy of Lavinia Strickland.

Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen formally opened in February of 1950 (fig. 5). Its normal

⁹Lavinia B. Strickland. Fifty-fifth wedding anniversary scrapbook presented to Charles and Marguerite Bryant, 15 August 1988, vol. 1.

seating capacity of fifty could be quickly expanded to one hundred if business warranted. The marble composition flooring, oak-paneled walls, easily-cleaned removable kitchen flooring, and thirty-square-foot kitchen freezer, with separate section for fruits and vegetables, earned it (in a moment of unabashed local boosterism) the appellation of "one of the most modern [restaurants] along the entire length of U. S. 301."¹⁰ Over the following years, Mrs. Bryant's would not only provide food for hungry travelers and local residents, but would also open its doors to Statesboro citizen meetings such as the 301 Association (of which Mr. Charles Bryant was an active member), the Kiwanis Club, and other local service groups.

Business entrepreneurs took advantage of the tourism boom, building several new tourist facilities and improving existing tourist-oriented businesses. In 1950, a new guest facility boasting over thirty units was built on South Main (301 South), just beyond the existing city limits, across the street from the already busy Stiles Motel. The following year, two additional tourist resorts were opened on Main Street. The Aldred Motel was constructed downtown beside the First Methodist church and the Parkwood Tourist Court, which sat just south of town on Highway 301, offered "a dozen modern cabins, elaborately furnished."¹¹ As local newspapers stressed, Statesboro's goal was caring for tourists--a far cry from the early days of autocamping.

¹⁰"Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen,' Restaurant, to Hold Formal Opening Sunday," *Bulloch Herald*, 9 February 1950, p. 1.

¹¹"Enlarged Plans: Care of Tourists," *Bulloch Times*, 4 May 1950, p. 1; "Care of Tourist Given High Boost," *Bulloch Times*, 22 November 1951, p. 1.

Leodel Coleman, the editor of the other local newspaper--the *Bulloch Herald*--was an enthusiastic supporter of the tourist business in Statesboro and believed wholeheartedly that the travellers up and down Highway 301 had significant positive impact on the economy and the citizens of Statesboro. Coleman even went so far as to place on the front page of his newspaper a weekly column with the typically grandiose title of "Who Says Tourists Don't Spend Money in Statesboro as They Follow the Sun?" Coleman used this column to demonstrate to the people of Bulloch County that tourists did indeed impact the town positively, so therefore he encouraged proper treatment by the local citizens.

Coleman divided tourists into two distinct categories--based on two methods of travel that were exchanging positions during this time of increased auto reliability and improving road surfaces. First, there was the "pidling" [sic] tourist, one who had a destination but no overarching timetable for arrival. The trip might frequently change course along the way as long as fun was the major objective of the journey. On the other hand, and later with the coming of the limited-access Interstate system the more dominant of the two, was the "scat" tourist who "travel[ed] from where he started to where he is going along the shortest possible route, in the quickest possible time."¹² Certainly, Statesboro hoped to cater to the more pidling type of tourists, as these were more likely to stop for more than basic supplies, thus increasing the local chances of economic gain.

Other individuals in Statesboro and Bulloch County also did their part to leave visitors with a favorable impression of the community. Chief of Police Henry Anderson

¹²Leodel Coleman, "Editor's Uneasy Chair," *Bulloch Herald*, 8 June 1950, p. 2.

was instrumental in such tourist-friendly activities. The police could easily have generated negative feelings towards tourists. After all, these cars from other parts of the country slowed traffic around the courthouse, jammed up the main shopping district and generally made local life more stressful. When tourists did stop to make small purchases or get a bite to eat, they took the limited parking spaces away from individuals who worked at the courthouse or department stores, or from local citizens, who spent significant amounts of money downtown.

Unlike nearby Ludowici, which was notorious for taking advantage of travelers by ensnaring them in speed traps on the edge of town and at rigged traffic lights, Statesboro, under Chief Anderson, initiated a welcome card campaign targeted at visitors who might have been ticketed elsewhere. A traveling businessman from Poughkeepsie, New York related his encounter with the Statesboro police in a letter sent to the *Herald*. Ormon Minton stopped for breakfast on North Main and while he was eating, his parking meter's time expired. When Mr. Minton returned to his car and discovered his mistake, rather than a ticket demanding payment he found instead one of Chief Anderson's cards. It welcomed him to Statesboro, explained his violation and politely asked him to keep traffic moving. He was not fined for the expired meter and encouraged to enjoy his visit! The surprised New Yorker reflected in his letter that "he did not usually find such consideration on his travels." In gratitude, he included a two dollar donation that he insisted was not to be used to pay the fine but for the benefit of Statesboro youth. Editor Coleman concluded by rightly observing, "This man will pass the word along to the effect

that Statesboro is a fine community, that it's on U. S. 301 and is one of the communities that makes 301 a desirable route to use."¹³

Even citizens with no direct business ties to the tourist traffic worked diligently to promote a good image of Statesboro. One community booster who gained local repute and constant newspaper coverage was Joe Zetterower, who in early 1951 began a campaign to plant flowering trees alongside Highway 301's right-of-way in an effort to beautify the local landscape and provide tourists with a pleasing first impression. His grandiose scheme was to plant three- to five-year-old trees every three hundred feet along 301 from "Bangor, Maine to Miami, Florida," and Mr. Zetterower earned the affectionate nickname of "Dogwood Joe" for his particular use of dogwoods in the scheme. He asked for the support of the local 301 Association and was willing to plant one mile of trees with his own money. In March, Dogwood Joe made good on his vision, planting two miles of trees while receiving an additional fifty dollars from motel owner Olin Stubbs of the Tobacco Trail Court to plant an additional mile. The local Girl Scout troop of Screven County planted a fourth mile of trees on U. S. 301 and a second sum of one hundred dollars was donated by another citizen. The next month, the *Savannah Morning*



Fig. 6 Postcard, Franklin's Drive-In Restaurant. Franklin's Restaurant survived the Interstate to provide valuable service to the citizens of Statesboro for over forty years. Courtesy Lavinia Strickland.

¹³"Two Dollars Was Not to Pay Fine," *Bulloch Herald*, 23 November 1950, p. 2.

News reported of the desire of the Gardenia Club of Savannah to form a Dogwood Society, with Joe Zetterower as the president.¹⁴ Mr. Zetterower died in October of 1957, long before his grandiose dreams of tree-lined highways would ever be realized. He would be pleased at the great progress of Statesboro, but more than likely dismayed at the decline of his beloved Highway 301.

Between 1950 and 1952, a mini-boom in new restaurant ventures occurred in Statesboro. At the turn of the decade, only three restaurants existed along the section of Highway 301 that passed through the city limits--Bill Strickland's "Friendly Restaurant," "The Dinner Bell," and the "301 Grill" situated in the newly annexed section of Andersonville. Other local favorites such as the "Nic Nac Grill" and the historic Jaeckel Hotel's dining room were nearby but in need of refurbishment. Both of these restaurants invested their profits in these needed improvements as did other local places such as Vandy Boyd's barbecue restaurant. When the "Friendly Restaurant" was eventually absorbed by the "Dinner Bell", such amenities as air conditioning and a soda fountain were added. Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen was built soon thereafter and the 301 Grill came under new management and was renamed the "Chicago Grill," which also received new air conditioning, furnishings, and wall redecoration. Joe Franklin also opened his well-known establishment, then called "Franklin Drive-In Restaurant", (fig. 6) on the corner of Highways 301 and 80, and he was soon joined by the "Town House Restaurant," located on South Main street. All of these new ventures were calculated responses to the

¹⁴"Sounds Fantastic, But--," *Bulloch Herald*, 22 February 1951, p. 2; "'Dogwood Joe' Dreams of Trees," *Bulloch Herald*, 29 March 1951, p. 2; "'Dogwood Joe's' Idea is Getting Around," *Bulloch Herald*, 5 April 1951, p. 2.

economic benefits of traveling tourists. The local citizens of Statesboro or Bulloch County could not support such a variety of eateries alone.

Another restaurant opened in 1967, but it was not located along the borders of Highway 301. "Mrs. Lee's Restaurant" was built about two miles west of U. S. 301 on West Jones Avenue. Operated by Mrs. Odella Lee, it catered to all tourists, but received much valuable patronage from African-American tourists who traveled to Florida along the same roads as their Caucasian counterparts--but with pressures unique to that historic time period. Mrs. Lee recalls that African-American tourists were unable to stop anywhere they wished and get something to eat during the segregated 1950s and 1960s.¹⁵ Her restaurant, though located off of Highway 301 because she was unable to afford building the restaurant directly along the highway, erected a large sign at the intersection of College Avenue and Main Street. Even without frontage on the highway, her business apparently did not suffer. Her restaurant ran three shifts, the night shift being the busiest because tourists were "looking for something to eat before going to bed."¹⁶

Mrs. Lee's Restaurant offered similar types of homemade food available at other local restaurants and faced the same crush of travelers as every other eating establishment. "During that time I was selling hamburgers made from scratch and actually I couldn't make them fast enough," remembers Mrs. Lee. She also served fish and chicken sandwiches, plus full dinners, and recalled that "it was nothing to make thirty dollars in an

¹⁵An illuminating look at the travel difficulties faced by African Americans is Stetson Kennedy's *Jim Crow Guide: The Way it Was* (Boca Raton, FL: Florida Atlantic University Press, 1989).

¹⁶Odella Lee, interview by author, 8 April 1997, tape recording with transcript.

hour [with hamburgers selling for thirty-five cents apiece]."¹⁷ Nevertheless, even if African-American tourists could find a place to eat in Statesboro, a place to stay for the night was a bit more difficult.

"Ella's Diner", run by Eloise Williams, offered accommodations to African-Americans, remembered Odella Lee. Again, not located along the edge of Highway 301 but on Elm Street, it provided clean rooms and southern food to its patrons. If African-American tourists chose not to patronize Ella's, however, there were other ways to find a place to stay. Mrs. Lee remembered that her relatives from New York often stayed with relatives in Statesboro when traveling down to Florida for conventions or vacations. Thus, the social pressures and prejudices of the times forced African-Americans to be more creative when traveling the coast, overcoming hardships and inconveniences not commonly encountered by white travelers.

It is difficult in this day of generic, mass-produced food to appreciate the effort and quality assurance that such local establishments as Mrs. Lee's and Mrs. Bryant's required. These restaurants were designed to emulate the style of meals cooked at home. Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen, for example, had several

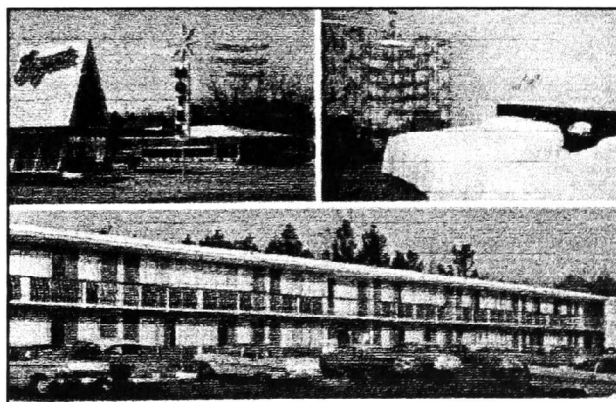


Fig. 7 Postcard Bryant's Motel. Many restaurants and motels existed side by side, providing lodging and food in one, locally-owned package. Courtesy of Lavinia Strickland.

¹⁷Ibid.

different cooks, each assigned a different part of the menu from meats to vegetables, breads to pastries. Also, the menu provided a surprisingly large array of meats--from veal to roast duck to seafood--as well as fresh produce and many, many desserts such as coconut and caramel cakes and fresh fruit cakes and pies. The Bryants had some advantage over other local restaurants, in that they also operated a fruit and produce operation that surely came in handy when stocking their kitchen in later years.¹⁸ But whatever the difficulties, success and word-of-mouth advertising certainly seemed to pay off. Apparently, Mrs. Bryant's was a favorite place to eat, no matter how difficult the trip. One Statesboro citizen who worked at the adjacent Bryant's Motel (fig. 7) reminisced about "hundreds who drove up to Bryant's Motel, got out of their car, [took] a big stretch and [said] 'We've drove 10 straight hours to get to Statesboro just so we could eat at Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen--the best food anywhere.'" Another traveler agreed with that assessment wholeheartedly, declaring that all along their East Coast vacation--from New York to Philadelphia, Toronto, Chicago, and Washington--nothing rivaled one small restaurant in Statesboro, Georgia: "... on all our future trips, we are routing ourselves at all times to place us in Statesboro around dinnertime."¹⁹

Statesboro reaped the benefits of tourism with these added businesses. However, this improvement was only within a narrow sector of the community as a whole. When tourists travelled through town, their extremely limited experience with Statesboro

¹⁸Lavinia Bryant Strickland, interview by author, 11 December 1996, tape recording with transcript.

¹⁹Strickland, *Scrapbook*, vol. 2.

centered around that small corridor of land that bordered Highway 301 on either side. Dr. Del Presley recalled an instance of this tourist myopia:

I was in Virginia . . . and my son ran into some people who were staying at the same inn. When he told them we were from Statesboro they clicked off . . . Carroll Blankenship's restaurant, Franklin's Restaurant, the Crossroads Motel, Bryant's Kitchen. These were people from a northern state who happened to be staying in Virginia that night, but they, when they heard the name Statesboro they thought only of the restaurants and motels. To them that was Statesboro. They didn't mention Georgia Southern . . . or the courthouse . . . or Vandy's Barbecue. So they saw Statesboro in terms of its facilities for travelers.²⁰

Merchants who were not involved in the tourist service business rarely felt the traveller's economic presence at all. This was not an industry that an entire community could base itself upon, but neither could it be ignored. Tourists, by the very nature of their limited experience in a community, are driven by first impressions, and therefore the tourist industry must be nurtured to ensure a steady harvest of visitors every year.

This became the duty of the Statesboro Highway 301 Association when it organized in June 1953. One of its first actions was to encourage surrounding counties affected by 301 to form their own chapters. The organization's goal was to formulate strategies to nurture tourists all along the Georgia 301 corridor, ensuring that visitors enjoyed their trip, thus creating good memories that encouraged a return trip the following year. The Association had no time to waste, according to Statesboro chapter president

²⁰Presley, interview.

Alfred Dorman. He believed that Highway 301 was already a year behind as compared to efforts along other regional highways in the United States. "Other cities and communities . . . are making strong bids for the tourist traffic," Dorman warned. "They are spending thousands and thousands of dollars in promoting new surfaces on their routes, in promoting the communities along the routes. . . . [I]f we don't get on the ball Statesboro, and the other towns along 301 are going to start wondering what happened to [the tourists]."21

The 301 Association vigorously promoted communities along its route. While working throughout the 1950s to promote community cooperation with its tourist goals, as the threat of the new Interstate 95 increasingly became a reality in the late 1960s, the Association quickly began lobbying with the State Department of Transportation for improvements along the Georgia corridor, enabling the older federal highway to better compete with the massive Interstate system. The Association wanted the entire route of 301 four-laned to eliminate traffic bottlenecks that slowed drivers' progress, emphasizing the disadvantages of regional highways when compared to the speedy Interstates. Nevertheless, during the years of the tourist boom, the Association concerned itself more with the image travellers took away from their 301 tour.

The need for each county to work in concert with one another was expressed with Long County particularly in mind. Ludowici, the county seat, developed quite a sordid reputation in Georgia due to its law enforcement practices. Many travelers over the years

²¹"Bulloch County Organizes U. S. 301 Association to Promote Highway," *Bulloch Herald*, 11 June 1953, p. 1.

recounted the various ways that Ludowici took advantage of out-of-town visitors. The stories boiled down to one general pattern that goes as follows.

A car was pulled over for speeding (and often another lengthy list of minor violations that quickly added up) and the driver was given a ticket by a local officer. This officer may or may not have worn a full dress uniform. Some reports indicated that arresting officers did not wear a hat or cap, which in some states is an official part of the uniform. The driver was given the option of paying the fine at the scene or in town at the police station.²² Occasionally the driver accompanied the officer to an impromptu court session at the local judge's yard-side courthouse or in a small shed built on the edge of the highway nearby just for such an eventuality. When alerted by the arresting officer, the judge arrived in his truck.²³ Others caught in speed traps might well wish for such quick court justice. One crucial aspect of the system was that court was held only once a month and since travelers were on a schedule, they were not able to attend in order to defend their position. So, they were often forced by circumstances to pay the fines, no matter how large or inflated with fees, and head off down the road a little lighter in the wallet.²⁴

²²"A Tourist Writes a Letter to Governor Vandiver," *Bulloch Herald*, 22 March 1962, p. 2.

²³Carroll Blankenship, interview by author, tape recording, 23 September 1996; Don Murray, "U. S. Speed Traps: Cash register justice," *Coronet* 49 (December 1960): 90.

²⁴Peter Wyden, "Traffic Traps: Legal rackets on the roads," *Coronet* 40 (October 1956): 69-70. Such fees included a "special" tax, recorder's court tax, law library, witness fees, and fees for a lawyer that might not even be requested or wanted by the accused. Of course, this could only be ascertained if the violator was lucky enough to get a receipt in the first place.

One unfortunate facet of these speed traps that remained constant throughout individual cases was the reports of belligerence of the arresting officers. A traveller in Florida described how he was ticketed for driving at seventy miles-per-hour and given the option to pay \$200 or wait for a week in jail for the next available court date. The driver had only \$113, so to jail he went. He had to stand, as there were no chairs available for "foreigners." He might well have remained in that situation indefinitely, however, save that the judge was contacted at four o'clock, and settled the case for \$100.²⁵

R. D. McArthur, of Cleveland, Ohio, recounted another incident that demonstrated the hostility shown to people ensnared in Ludowici's motorist trap. When a suspicious blue Ford suddenly veered out from behind a trailing car, the visitor slowed quickly to fifty miles-per-hour. He claimed that his vehicle was incapable of exceeding sixty-five miles-per-hour due to a loose front end that vibrated badly and therefore was positive that he had not broken the speed limit. When the Ford sounded its siren and pulled the tourist over, the driver was forced to walk back to the arresting officer's car. The officer's first words were, "You can't come down here and push us around!" He then quickly rattled off a series of violations that totalled almost \$120. Mr. McArthur asked the officer to repeat the list of offenses more slowly, but was quickly rebuked as being "pushy." The officer gave McArthur the option of paying there or downtown. He decided to pay downtown, hoping to speak with someone a little more reasonable.

Unfortunately, when they arrived at the station house, McArthur was again treated disdainfully, given no chance to dispute several violations that he maintained were false.

²⁵Ibid., 67.

After reluctantly handing over the bond money, he asked for directions out of town and back to the highway. The officer replied, "get out of town the best you can," then proceeded to trail the Ohio car's departure, clearly hoping to catch him in another traffic violation. When none was forthcoming, the officer zoomed on ahead. McArthur reported that on the way back to the highway, not minutes later, he passed the same officer stopping another hapless tourist.²⁶

Such practices endangered Georgia's reputation, made anyone traveling down Highway 301 wary, and gave the local 301 Association obvious headaches. Association members wanted every community along Highway 301 to realize that whatever happened in one section affected the prosperity of the other communities along the corridor. Newspapers described Ludowici's methods as "high-handed" and "playing havoc with tourists." They accused Long County officials of being more concerned with collecting revenue than working to safeguard motorists.²⁷

Yet this was hardly just a local or a Georgia problem. Due to the popularity of automobile driving, speed traps existed all over the nation, lurking everywhere from Missouri to Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, and Ohio. Any community that supported a large number of out-of-town tourists was prime territory for speed traps. Tourists were the natural targets due to their unfamiliarity with the region, their inability to represent themselves at a distant court date, and the usual possession of some spending cash

²⁶"Letter to Vandiver," *Bulloch Herald*, 22 March 1962, p. 2.

²⁷"We Can't be Independent," *Bulloch Herald*, 5 April 1951, p. 2.

earmarked for a vacation. Ninety percent of violators caught in one Florida town were out-of-state tourists while in a Kentucky town the total was ninety-five percent visitors.²⁸

The fee system was a common element in all of these speed-trap towns. Under this system, local judges' salaries were tied to the amount of traffic revenue their community collected. These justices-of-the-peace thus had a monetary interest in the policing of their county highways that often superceeded mere law enforcement or safety concerns. Local sheriffs and deputies might also receive most of their revenues from traffic violation fees. One victim in Missouri claimed to hear the officer present his case to the judge with this opening, "Well, Judge, here is ham and eggs for breakfast."²⁹ The practice became such a common occurrence around the nation that a national magazine offered tips for the informed tourist. Along with the common-sense advice of obeying all traffic laws in each state and always remaining polite, other important tips included stopping at state lines to ask which towns to avoid, and never paying the officer at the roadside but always downtown in the presence of the judge, as they were sometimes inclined to be more lenient. Indeed, some J.P.s would accept watches or other valuables in lieu of cash, but no prepared traveller should venture onto the highways with less than \$50 in cash.³⁰

Some towns became justifiably famous for their inventive and lucrative methods of entrapping motorists. Lawtey, Florida became prominent for its shopping center routine.

²⁸Wyden, "Traffic Traps," 69.

²⁹Ibid., 70.

³⁰Ibid., 71.

According to a magazine expose, an individual in on the scam continually pulled in and out of a curb-side parking space in the Lawtey shopping center. When successful, the moving car would force unsuspecting motorists to avoid it by crossing over the center dividing line, technically breaking the law and quickly being caught by a nearby policeman. The other famous trap in the Southeast was indisputably the Ludowici traffic light. Called "the most famous stop light in America," Ludowici's light worked for thirteen years (since 1947) and netted for the town \$50,000 a year.³¹

Ludowici's light was triggered to a button activated by a policeman stationed upstairs in a nearby building. The red light was held until a sizeable line of traffic backed up along the north-bound lane turning left. A green light allowed cars to turn, but not for long. In as little as sixteen seconds, the traffic light quickly shifted back to red, catching impatient travelers as they rolled on ahead under the red light. Offenders were quickly fined by the town's three-man police force.³² Ludowici Mayor J. W. Godfrey explained that the light had been known to "vary four to five seconds in wet weather." One wit observed that rain was frequent enough in Ludowici for this variance to account for thirty arrests per day, producing one-quarter of the town's \$12,000-\$15,000 annual budget!³³ It was indeed, as *Time* magazine dubbed it, "The Light that Never Fails."

³¹Murray, "Speed Traps," 84. In a November 1959 *Time* magazine article, members of the local Good Government League agreed with the \$50,000 figure.

³²Blankenship, interview; "The Light that Never Fails," *Time* 74 (November 16, 1959): 33.

³³"Light that Never Fails," 33. Not surprisingly, the author of the article was not allowed to examine the town's financial records.

The 301 Association and the American Automobile Association worked very hard to eliminate this type of corruption and trickery along Highway 301. In the summer of 1960, the 301 Association adopted a twenty-point resolution designed to combat Georgia's bad tourist image and develop better strategies to regulate traffic control excesses. Among the resolutions passed were pleas to local newspapers along Highway 301 to appraise the citizens of the importance of tourism and "the shocking conditions that affect the industry and are prevalent in some sections of the state." The Association also wished to uncover the annual amount of money paid out to local law enforcement, how that money was distributed within the local areas, and publish these figures in local newspapers. Also, local law enforcement officers would be required to wear complete uniforms at all times and patrol in marked vehicles.³⁴ All of these resolutions targeted such controversial practices as those in Ludowici. The *Herald* praised the bold actions of the Association, declaring that it "lowered the boom on the business of camouflaging the practice of trapping tourists under the canopy of law enforcement."³⁵

Ludowici's rigged light was finally removed, but only after convincing the Georgia Department of Transportation to erect a new light--two-thirds of the purchase cost being covered by the merchant and motel-owners who were members of the Georgia 301 Association. They also erected large signs outside of the Ludowici city limits warning

³⁴"U.S. 301 Association adopts twenty-point resolution," *Bulloch Herald*, 18 August 1960, p. 1.

³⁵"U.S. 301 Association takes positive action," *Bulloch Herald*, 18 August 1960, p. 2.

uninformed tourists of speed traps and clip joints.³⁶ One of the 301 Association's biggest headaches was finally eliminated.

But such successes notwithstanding, the time for Highway 301's decline was approaching. The Interstate Highway system, created by Congress in 1955, was quickly becoming a reality. In 1960, community boosters and the Chamber of Commerce saw a portent of the future when the proposed route of Interstate 16, connecting Savannah and Macon, was moved from being only 3 1/2 miles away from Statesboro to a potentially isolating eleven miles away. Rather than take solace in the fact that Highway 301 was still running through the heart of downtown Statesboro, Chamber member R. J. Kennedy warned that this alteration could "seriously affect the future growth and development of Statesboro."³⁷ The Interstate provided an exciting new way to travel for a nation now taking the automobile and highway travel for granted. This massive construction project promised to link all of the major centers of population in the United States with limited-access expressways that routed around cities at high speeds. Leodel Coleman would understand that the era of the "scat" tourist was quickly arriving.

The altered route of Interstate 16 was troublesome enough to Statesboro citizens who hoped the expressway would help to introduce more industrial growth to their area. However, for the motel operators, restaurant owners, and other service-oriented businesses, the true problem looming over the horizon was not Interstate 16, but Interstate

³⁶Blankenship, interview; Murray, "Speed Traps," 84.

³⁷"Statesboro Chamber of Commerce to support original proposal by state for U.S. Interstate Highway 16," *Bulloch Herald*, 16 June 1960, p. 1.

95. Interstate 16 ran in an east-to-west direction, cutting across the state horizontally. Interstate 95 travelled north-to-south, paralleling the route of Highway 301 all the way down the East Coast and all through the eastern coastal area of Georgia. Therefore, when the Interstate system was completed, I-95 would pose the greatest threat to the future viability of Highway 301 as a tourist road. Furthermore, since I-95 was never slated to come anywhere close to the city limits of Statesboro or to Bulloch County, a loss of tourist traffic from Highway 301 to Interstate 95 would mean a separation of potential tourist cash, far removed from Statesboro. This was a growing concern of Bulloch County in the 1960s and became a grim reality in the early 1970s. The tourist boom years in Statesboro were coming to an end.

CHAPTER THREE

"Superslab": The Interstate 95 Monster

"Without th[ese] improvements, 301 will completely become what has already begun, serving no other purpose than a farm-to-market road and local travel, and the winds of time will finally blow away the remaining debris of the fallen buildings that once paved the roads for which is now one of Georgia's greatest industries, Tourism."¹ This ruinous vision of Highway 301's future was expressed by former 301 Association member, Carroll Blankenship, on the occasion of an address to the Statesboro Chamber of Commerce in 1992. His concern was also voiced decades before by the Association, as it lobbied the Georgia Department of Transportation for improvements to Highway 301 that would let it better compete with the coming of Interstate 95. The construction of Interstate 95, the Association feared, would end Highway 301's usefulness as a tourist route to Florida, thereby dooming the many tourist-related businesses along the highway's path. The Association believed that the best hope was to begin converting the highway immediately to four lanes throughout Georgia. This would improve and speed the traffic flow and enable the historic road to compete upon a more even footing with the limited-access Interstate being completed fifty miles to the east. It would also give the businesses

¹Carroll Blankenship, Address to Statesboro Chamber of Commerce, copy of speech given to author, 7 December 1992.

dependant upon tourists a chance to stave off the vision conjured by many prophets of doom over the years such as Blankenship's.

Yet, years of determined advocacy failed to produce highway improvements to the large extent that the local Association deemed necessary. The optimistic era of Interstate travel was dawning throughout the United States, and the focus of improvements shifted from regional highways to the newer expressways. Much of the news copy surrounding the Interstate system bordered on the giddy, so enamored of these new roadways was the press. *National Geographic* declared the Interstate "the greatest revolution in ground transportation since the invention of the wheel."²

Typical press coverage of the Interstate construction emphasized two basic points, safety and speed. The Interstate system's greatest asset was its limited access lanes with at least two lanes going in each direction. This provided convenient passing and constant velocity. Coupled with this increase in speed were road improvements that ensured safety at such a rapid pace. Engineers widened the highway lanes and road shoulders, striving to make these expressways as straight as possible, eliminating curves and hills that obstructed long sightlines necessary while travelling at high speeds. The Director of the Bureau of Public Roads (as well as the newly created federal Department of Transportation) Francis C. Turner believed that highway deaths would drop by 6,000 a year thanks to the improvements created with the Interstates, with an additional 2,000 fewer deaths resulting

²Robert Paul Jordan, "The Growing Interstate Highway System," *National Geographic* 133 (February 1968): 195.

from a lessening of congestion on the older roads. Also, more direct routing would decrease the mileage between cities by twenty-five percent.³

However, in a strange dichotomy, while press articles emphasized the safety improvements of the new expressways, they also showed a curious concern for the increasing potential for accidents. Driving an automobile of the early twentieth century required much attention and thought. But the creation of automatic transmission, smoother-riding cars and limited access highways that required little stopping or slowing made it possible to operate a vehicle "without being fully engaged in the act":

The mind doesn't exactly switch off, but rather, like the transmission, operates in automatic mode. Especially on a familiar route, as when commuting [or driving many hours on vacation], it is possible to turn driving into an almost passive activity, in which essential maneuvers. . . are performed from habit as much as from calculated response to changing conditions.⁴

In order to combat this "highway hypnosis", more curves were added to a stretch of highway between Richmond, Virginia and Washington, D. C.⁵ The monotony of high speeds and the emphasis on flat landscaping increased the possibilities of a driver's attention wandering. Additional curves forced a motorist to remain alert.

³Ibid., 198.

⁴Christopher Finch, *Highway to Heaven: The AUTO Biography of America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 329-30.

⁵Duane L. Gregg, "What You Should Know About Driving the Interstate Highways," *Better Homes and Gardens* 45 (June 1967): 32.

Another disquieting instance of the possible dangers of the Interstate came in the same *National Geographic* article that so broadly praised the roadway. One of the innovations that impressed the author was the addition of break-away signposts designed with a hinge joint to allow the metal post to swing away from the windshield of a speeding, out-of-control car. Additionally, the constant speed of the Interstates could "bleed" off into the regular roads that connect to the expressways. Drivers exiting the Interstate system might succumb to the habit of speeding and fail to check their speed on the off ramp.⁶ So while the Interstate system may have helped decrease overall national death rates, it was not without some risks.

William Toth pointed this out in an article he wrote for *American Home* magazine entitled "The Interstate--America's Dream Road." He warned drivers to evaluate these statistics with a critical eye: "Don't let the low mileage-fatality rate give you a false sense of security. . . . This rate figure is a national average, meaning some sections have a higher rate while others have a lower one." Toth concluded that "the higher rate in some cases is higher than the national average for *all other roads* [italics mine]."⁷ The relentless push for speed and awareness was another aspect of these early press articles. Strategies that drivers today might take as a matter of course were important educational tips for drivers in these dawning days of Interstate access. Such tips included being aware of your destination. "You should know in advance the exit or route number where you'll leave the

⁶Jordan, "Growing Interstate Highway System," 205-07.

⁷William J. Toth, "The Interstate--America's Dream Road," *American Home* 71 (June 1968): 23.

highway", admonished one author, because "your town may not be on a sign."⁸ Knowing where you were headed and when to get off the expressway was the surest way to keep the lanes of traffic moving. Unlike the regional highways, were the pace of traffic was less emphasized, slowing to find you exit was not encouraged upon the Interstate system. As William Toth put it, "You must keep up your speed. This is no place to dilly-dally."⁹

The Interstates were the domain of Coleman's "scat" tourist. Being pushed along the lanes of quick-moving traffic, intent solely upon their exit of interest, some drivers paid little attention to anything not on the itinerary. Also the engineering specifications of the Interstate roads demanded large amounts of land to build the roadways upon. As a result, the landscape surrounding an Interstate highway (certainly in the Southern Coastal Plain where I-95 ran through Georgia) could often be flat and uninteresting. Within this context, it became easy to bypass many communities while traveling down the eastern coast.

The Interstate represented a sense of national power to the press of the 1960s. It was this sense of power that writers like William Toth meant when they compared the Interstates to great projects of ancient times. They wished to convey how the Interstates muscled their way along the American landscape, climbing above or blasting through the Rocky Mountains, snaking the coastlines, or racing across the Great Plains or desert Southwest. On a grand scale, the Interstate system was impressive enough, but to individuals it sometimes had its drawbacks.

⁸Gregg, "What You Should Know," 32.

⁹Toth, "America's Dream Road," 22.

The road system was such a massive effort that it affected individuals and communities all across the nation as it neared completion in the early 1970s. But, not everyone was pleased with the results. Since the Interstates' primary function was to connect the major metropolitan centers of the United States, major construction projects were focused in the larger cities. Residents in Boston and San Francisco protested the heavy-handed way in which these new travel arteries cut through two of America's oldest cities. Tensions were high enough in San Francisco for residents to consider tearing down the existing section of Interstate already completed.¹⁰ In 1968, an Illinois farmer discovered not only that I-55's route was slated to pass through his farmland, but also that he would be forced to drive four miles to take his harvested hay from one field and store it in his barn across the road.¹¹ While these problems were isolated instances, there were other criticisms of the Interstate system that dealt with its planned carrying capacity and its viability for future use.

The Interstates were designed to improve traffic flow especially around metropolitan areas, due to its primary Cold War function as a system for easily transporting military troops and equipment across the country.¹² It also provided quicker access to commuters travelling between these cities, and this would ultimately become its

¹⁰The Reporter's Notes, "Traffic Jam," *The Reporter* 34 (April 7, 1960): 16.

¹¹Jordan, "Growing Interstate Highway System," 210.

¹²The idea of a national road system functioning as a military delivery system dates as far back as John C. Calhoun's term in Congress. See *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Robert L. Meriwether, vol. 1, 1801-1817, *Speech on the Revenue Bill* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), 326.

primary purpose. Therefore, at least four lanes were constructed for each road and as these roads approached cities, they quickly mushroomed into multiple lane systems accessing major city streets. When construction of new roads between cities was in full swing in the 1960s and improvements were made to city access roads, the system seemed more than adequate to handle future loads. However, not everyone shared this optimistic view. In 1966, Arthur D. Little, Inc., while conducting a study for a Presidential Advisory Committee on highway improvements, commented that "Presumably there is one day in 1980 for which all Interstate Highways are to be designed without regard for their under-use before that day or their obsolescence thereafter."¹³ While there were many areas of the nation, especially in the Great Plains region, where many lonely miles of Interstate were planned to traverse areas that clearly would not merit such four-lane roadways, more individuals were concerned with the accelerated obsolescence of the highway system that was designed to solve traffic problems.

Two examples of this increase in automobile traffic are offered to show that no matter how hard the Federal Department of Transportation worked to keep the roads ahead of demand, more and more motorists jammed the lanes hoping that this system would provide the unencumbered route they desired. The Verrazano-Narrows Bridge (still a relatively new transportation improvement in 1968) linking Staten Island to Brooklyn was so popular that one engineer believed the lower deck of six additional lanes would have to be built and finished in 1969 to provide the necessary lanes to accommodate the unexpectedly heavy traffic flow. Secretary of Transportation Alan S.

¹³The Reporter's Notes, "Traffic Jam," 18.

Boyd believed congestion was growing to be such a problem that "we may have to book starting times on some major highways, just as golfers now arrange tee-off times on crowded courses."¹⁴ While DOT chose to continue adding lanes rather than resort to such a bureaucratic solution, it soon became clear that the Interstates were sometimes more of an inconvenience than was originally envisioned.

To the citizens and community builders of Statesboro, however, the inconvenience of traffic on Interstates meant two things. The Interstates, as evidenced by such large floods of people to its lanes, could pose a serious threat to the tourist businesses along Highway 301. On the other hand, it might be possible to draw tourists to Highway 301 if Interstate congestion continued to worsen. Something needed to be done for the businesses on Highway 301 for, beginning in 1958, the State Highway Department in Atlanta confirmed the fears that Highway 17 running through Savannah was carrying more tourists north-to-south than Highway 301. This was a reversal of recent years of tourist travel habits and caused concern among members of the local 301 Association. Charles Bryant felt that the reputations of speed trap towns on Highway 301 were responsible for the loss in traffic. He was assigned the task of conducting an up-to-date traffic count to determine the amount of travelers on Highways 17 and 301. In 1953, a similar traffic count showed that Highway 301 was carrying more traffic than Highway 17. For the first six months of that year, the number of vehicles passing a selected location within a twenty-four hour period averaged over 5,000 cars passing along Highway 301 in every month except May, which totalled just above 4,000 cars. Highway 17's traffic count never

¹⁴Jordan, "Growing Interstate Highway System," 214, 208.

topped June's pinnacle of 4,672. Mr. Bryant speculated that the adverse effects of speed traps on Highway 301 were responsible for the drop in traffic by 1958.¹⁵ Accurate figures were very important to the 301 Association because such indications of highway usage were an important factor in gaining funds from the State Highway Department for improvements. Throughout the next decade, gaining support for four-laning improvements would dominate the efforts of the local 301 Association as it prepared for the onslaught of Interstate 95.

Indeed, in August 1958, the State Highway Department began conducting travel survey interviews to ascertain who was travelling Highway 301. Personnel were stationed at strategic areas along the highway, stopping travelers from early in the morning to mid-afternoon, and quickly questioning what their origin and destination was, the purpose of their trip, and if they planned to stop in Statesboro. Simultaneous with this survey was another report comparing the traffic loads of Highway 17 and Highway 301. The figures for the first six months of the year showed Highway 301 again leading Highway 17 in total number of travelers. Highway 301 carried just under 5,400 cars for the first quarter of the year--fifty-nine percent foreign (meaning out-of-state) passenger cars--to Highway 17's 4,381, of which fifty-two percent was foreign. The second quarter of the year confirmed this trend between the two highways, but Highway 17's percentage reduction of foreign

¹⁵"U. S. 301 Losing Tourist Traffic to Highway 17," *Bulloch Herald*, 26 June 1958, p. 1; "Traffic Count Shows U. S. 301 is Being Used More Than U. S. 17," *Bulloch Herald*, 24 July 1955, p. 1.

passenger cars to forty-six percent showed more decline than 301's modest fall to fifty-seven percent.¹⁶

The Association also continued to fight Georgia's reputation as a state full of speed traps and crooked police, battling legislation that allowed state patrolmen to use unmarked vehicles, while promoting legislation that would abolish the fee system. The Association mailed telegrams to all members of the Georgia legislature who resided in counties traversed by Highway 301 as well as to Governor S. Ernest Vandiver and the lieutenant governor. The telegram targeting the abolishment of the fee system, which was a root cause of many traffic violations in the state, claimed that some sheriffs in Georgia earned up to an astonishing \$100,000 per year through collection of such fees.¹⁷ Local legislators soon urged the Bulloch county sheriff be removed from the fee system and given a yearly salary of \$9,000. While this was estimated to be a slight reduction in salary for the sheriff, it would serve to set an example that was sorely needed along the Highway 301 corridor.¹⁸

While the boosters of Highway 301 continued to fight these smaller battles over the abolishment of the fee system and the "cancer" of speed traps (as one editorial named

¹⁶"State Highway Department Now Conducting Traffic Survey Here," *Bulloch Herald*, 7 August 1958, p. 1; "New Figures Show More Foreign Passenger Cars on 301 than 17," *Bulloch Herald*, 14 August 1958, p. 1.

¹⁷"U. S. 301 Association Opposes Use of Unmarked Cars by Georgia State Patrol," *Bulloch Herald*, 21 January 1960, p. 1.

¹⁸"Legislation Up to Put Sheriff and Ordinary of County on Salary Basis," *Bulloch Herald*, 28 January 1960, p. 1.

it¹⁹), there were larger issues that occupied much of the efforts of the 301 Association especially after 1965, and until the collapse of the organization in the 1970s. Aimed at improving Highway 301's ability to compete on a more equal footing with the Interstates, the most important project was converting Highway 301 to four lanes throughout Georgia. This would enable the regional highway to carry more traffic at a faster pace and would eliminate occasional stoppages of traffic at areas that had been problematic for years. While Interstate 95 (which began construction in 1962) benefitted from plenty of press coverage and an ambience of newness about it, 301 had the advantage of familiarity. Travelers knew its turns and the towns and services offered along the way. If Highway 301 could match the added speed and flow of traffic that the Interstate provided, towns like Statesboro and its boosters would rest easier in the belief that their economic developments were not in vain.

Traffic bottlenecks existed in many towns along Highway 301. Statesboro, Sylvania, and Claxton all experienced similar difficulties when tourist traffic combined with local drivers and traffic lights. Many citizens of Statesboro remember traffic stretching bumper-to-bumper along Main Street from the downtown intersection to the edge of Georgia Southern College. This was simultaneously an indication of the popularity of Highway 301 as an avenue of travel and a sign of the problems faced by those trying to address the matter of continuous traffic flow.

¹⁹"The Cancer Breaks Out Again at Ludowici," *Bulloch Herald*, 12 May 1960, p. 2.

A by-pass around the town in question was the most common way to address these traffic difficulties, and Highway 301 was routed around several cities in the 1960s. When news arrived in 1961 that the Georgia Highway Department was planning to construct four-lane by-passes along the edge of Sylvania and Claxton, a sort of siege mentality developed in Statesboro. Individuals began to see the coming inevitability of a by-pass around Statesboro, cutting the tourist traffic off from the existing shops and restaurants located within the city limits. In Sylvania, the directing engineer of the Planning Division of the State Highway Department spoke of the effects of possible by-pass routes. Roy Flynt reminded his audience that by-passes were already under construction on Highway 301's immediate traffic rivals, Highways 17 and U. S. 1. These two highways were the original popular routes to Florida until Highway 301's construction and superior quality drew the majority of traffic to its lanes. Flynt attempted to put by-passes in a better light by noting that "traffic counts already show[ed] that 17 is fastly regaining its former prestige as a tourist route, and unless 301 was made equally as good as a tourist route, it would lose favor with the tourists."²⁰ While boosters were struggling with the question of how to view by-passes, the really bad news came the following month (July 1961), the Highway department and the Coastal Highway District announced the final route of Interstate 95.

Even though they long feared the effects of Interstate 95, the community leaders of Statesboro and Bulloch County immediately warned the people of the possibilities they

²⁰"We Must be Ready When the Time Comes," *Bulloch Herald*, 15 June 1961, p. 2; "Sylvania Hears Proposal for U. S. 301 in City," *Bulloch Herald*, 15 June 1961, p. 9.

foresaw. Even if some did not see it as an important bit of news, the *Bulloch Herald* believed "the future of U. S. 301 and what it means to Statesboro and Bulloch County is tied up in that announcement. . . ." This section of I-95 started south in Brunswick at the Sidney Lanier bridge and ran east of Darien through Liberty and Bryant counties, junctioned with U. S. Highway 17 south of Richmond Hill and then crossed the Ogeechee and Savannah rivers into South Carolina on its way to Santee. "It doesn't take a South Georgia gypsy palm reader to tell us that when Interstate 95 is completed--say within ten years--our U. S. 301 will suffer," warned the *Herald* article. "For you see," it continued, "Interstate 95 will follow the present 301 route from the North and east down to the central part of South Carolina from where it veers off towards Savannah to meet the section coming up from Brunswick . . ." ²¹

To those who held confidently that much could be done to stave off defeat within ten years, the article continues with a baleful tone: "Think back, just ten years ago. It seems just yesterday and we were talking about doing something about U. S. 301 coming through Statesboro [meaning the bottlenecks downtown, especially a turn at the corner of N. Main and Parrish Street]. And we're still in the talking stage." The article ended with a battle cry that would drive the 301 Association for the next ten critical years: "Let's not let Interstate 95 slip up on us! Let's begin now getting 301 in a competitive position when I-95 does come!" The surest way to do this was to increase the number of lanes, giving

²¹"We Must Work to Make U. S. 301 Competitive," *Bulloch Herald*, 27 July 1961, p. 2.

travelers a choice "when they reach the dividing point up in South Carolina" [Santee] and avoid letting tourists take the Interstate all the way through Georgia.²²

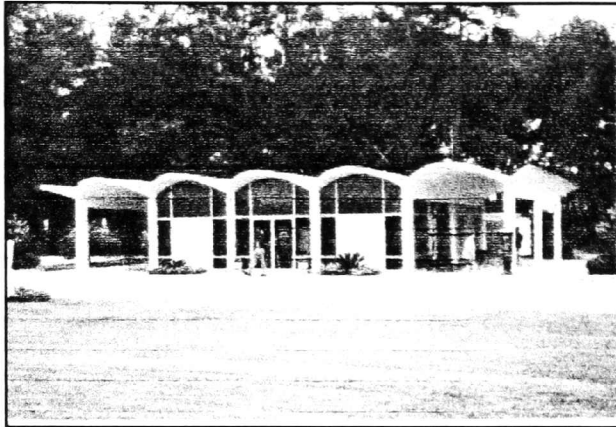


Fig. 8 State of Georgia Welcome Center, U. S. Highway 301. The Georgia Welcome Center handled many complaints from speed trap victims, while also directing visitors to the sights of Georgia. Author's photo.

While the local Association was mustering its forces, the tourism industry on Highway 301 received another supporter when the State of Georgia Welcome Station officially opened its doors in January 1962. The staff of the center, which was located alongside U. S. Highway 301 just south of the Georgia-South Carolina border (fig. 8), twenty miles north of Sylvania, Georgia, urged all sections of the state to send promotional materials for display in the lobby, giving information about tourist attractions in various Georgia cities.²³ Over the next few years, the staff of the welcome center would hear many stories concerning speed traps in Georgia and work to dispel the wide

²²Ibid.

²³"Welcome Station to Open on U. S. 301 at South Carolina State Line," *Bulloch Herald*, 18 January 1962, p. 1.

perception of discrimination felt by out-of-state travelers. Also the national press highlighted dangerous towns along Georgia highways and the American Automobile Association distributed information about Georgia speed traps by indicating with a red line on their travel maps any sections of highway that were homes of these illegal ventures.²⁴ As usual, Ludowici was a target of these sanctions and finally the Georgia legislature attempted to control the town's activities. Representatives from Bulloch and Screven counties introduced a bill in the Georgia legislature to ban the use of speed guns or other electronic equipment by any law officers but the State Highway Patrol. The bill, which passed 138 to 15, singled out no particular section of the state, but Ludowici reacted quickly in any event. The local police resorted to sitting in their patrolcars alongside the roadside and then clocking speeders by tailing behind the targeted vehicle. The Ludowici chief of police remarked that while using electronic devices "he was inclined to give a little leeway [to speeders] . . . [n]ow he catches as many as possible."²⁵ As always, such activities continued to act as an impediment to achieving the perfect conditions for tourist attraction in southeast Georgia.

The Interstate system continued to be a subject of importance as well. Beginning in the Spring of 1965, reporter Tommy Holton began examining in depth the impact of the two Interstates in eastern Georgia--16 and 95--on Statesboro. His four-part series painted a clear picture of warning for the tourist industry. Holton estimated that the draw of traffic to I-16 and I-95 would cause a loss of six million dollars generated annually by

²⁴"Cancer Breaks Out," *Bulloch Herald*, 12 May 1960, p. 2.

²⁵"Now Let's Get Rid of the 'Fee Device'," *Bulloch Herald*, 8 February 1962, p. 2.

tourists visiting Bulloch County. This did not include about six million additional dollars invested in the seventy-three tourist-related service industries in the county, or the approximately six hundred individuals employed by these businesses. Charles Bryant, then chairman of the local 301 Association, estimated that the Interstates would reduce the tourist traffic on Highway 301 by around eighty percent.²⁶ A study conducted as I-95 drew to completion estimated that these tourist-supported businesses accounted for forty percent of Bulloch County's budget and that after 1976, Highway 301 would receive only fifteen percent of the Florida-bound tourist traffic, dropping Mr. Bryant's doleful estimate to even less.²⁷

For those who were not aware of the impact of tourist-generated business in Bulloch County or for those who felt it was a minuscule part of the annual budget, Holton's next article tried to demonstrate otherwise. He asserted that the income generated by the tourist industry in 1964 "could have built 122 new homes, sixteen new commercial buildings, eight apartment buildings, and would have paid more than 300 individuals a [then respectable] salary of \$1,780." Holton also pointed out that as little as twenty-four tourists a day can be the equivalent of a new manufacturing industry with a payroll of \$100,000. Local opinion seemed in general to demonstrate only a certain level of awareness of the importance of tourism, as evidenced by a conversation Holton quotes

²⁶Tommy Holton, "Bulloch Stands to Lose \$6 Million Yearly to Interstate Highways," *Bulloch Herald and Bulloch Times*, 29 April 1965, p. 1.

²⁷Eric Hill Associates, *U. S. 301 Regional Development Study*, Commissioned by the Altamaha Georgia Southern Area Planning and Development Commission, Atlanta: Eric Hill Associates, 6, 20.

from two townspeople in a restaurant. " 'I don't particularly care if the highways came by here or not,' " said one citizen. " 'At least we won't have to put up with that traffic.' " " 'Yea,' " agreed his companion, " 'but our economy will surely go to the dogs.'"²⁸ This lack of understanding by many Bulloch Countians worried the 301 Association and accounted for its tireless efforts to educate citizens and work to maintain such a lucrative source of income for the county.

In the 1960s, planning and development commissions conducted studies examining the impact of tourism along Georgia's highways. The state was very interested in determining how much money tourism brought to the state and what action could be taken to improve such income for the future. The interest in tourism was especially strong during this time because of trends in migration away from rural counties toward urban areas. This movement was in part initiated through the automobile itself, the impact of which was briefly examined in the first chapter. Also, steady improvements in agricultural technology and increased job automation (in agricultural as well as industrial areas) signalled a possible decline in employment. Tourism encouraged a type of service employment that was less affected by automation and therefore useful for promotion in areas of the state where industry was low and agricultural job opportunities continually declining.²⁹ One study showed that in areas that did not have extensive attractions for

²⁸Holton, "Interstate Threat Seen as First State Contracts are Let," *Bulloch Herald and Bulloch Times*, 6 May 1965, p. 3A.

²⁹John R. Thompson, *A Study of Tourism in the Altamaha Area* (For the Altamaha Area Planning and Development Commission. By the Bureau of Business and Economic Research and the Institute of Community and Area Development. Athens: University of Georgia, 1964), 2.

tourists, but only served as a pass-through area, service stations received the majority of the tourist dollar.³⁰ But, Statesboro restaurateur R. C. Webb remembers the importance of those service stations in a different way. Though Webb's "Nic Nac Grill" was not located on Highway 301, he recalls that local service stations recommended his establishment to 301 tourists and they came "year in and year out until they opened [Interstate] 95."³¹ In 1966, just over four and a half million tourists spent almost twenty million dollars in the Georgia Southern area.³² Data showed that, as in the Altamaha area, "pass-through" tourists were the most frequent visitors to the Georgia Southern/Statesboro area. Lodging, eating, and auto service and repair accounted for over ninety percent of the tourist money spent in Bulloch County, as compared to only slightly above eighty percent for the state of Georgia as a whole.³³

The "pass-through" nature of such tourism has led to the local apathy and occasional resentment encountered by tourist examiners. Even though the belief that

³⁰\$2,792,000 for service stations as compared to \$977,000 for dining and \$1,028,400 for lodging in the Altamaha area. This amounted to fifty-six percent of the total tourist dollar spent in the area, as compared to only twenty-three percent state-wide tourist money spent on auto service. From *ibid.*, 14-15.

³¹R. C. Webb, interview by author, tape recording with transcript, 17 October 1996.

³²This area was defined to include Bulloch, Candler, Chatham, Effingham, and Evans counties.

³³Adolph Sanders, *Tourism Development in the Coastal Empire of Georgia* (For the Georgia Southern Area Planning and Development Commission. By the Bureau of Business and Economic Research and the Institute of Community and Area Development. Athens: University of Georgia, 1968), 3.

tourism does not contribute much to the local economy is obviously not true, the common assumption that wealthy Northeasterners were zipping by en route to more exclusive areas in Florida where things were nicer, crept into the minds of many Georgians. Indeed, if the tourist was simply viewed as a "... rich Yankee speeding through our towns in his Cadillac on his way to Florida,"³⁴ it is not surprising that some Georgia towns set up speed traps of every kind to slow them down and get as much money out of them as possible before they barreled across the state line.

These tourism studies agreed that the areas surrounding U. S. Highway 301 must develop new methods of tourist attraction to better survive the completion of the Interstate system. These reports did not say that such improvements would guarantee drawing out-of-state tourists. Indeed, they stressed the need to alter the focus of tourism and try to invite in-state travelers instead; if out-of-state visitors came for the same reasons, so much the better. The studies agreed that the highway infrastructure had to be improved, though not to the extent that the 301 Association advocated. While that local body preached the total widening of 301 throughout the state, these investigations more realistically targeted only certain areas for improvement to four lanes. The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) determined through vacationing studies that growing numbers of urban dwellers were looking for weekend activities that focused on the outdoors. These reports revealed that two-thirds of all vacationers

³⁴Sanders, *Tourism Development in the Georgia Southern Area* (Travel Research Study No. 9. For the Georgia Southern Area Planning and Development Commission. By the Bureau of Business and Economic Research and the Institute of Community and Area Development. Athens: University of Georgia, 1968), Sect. III, 15.

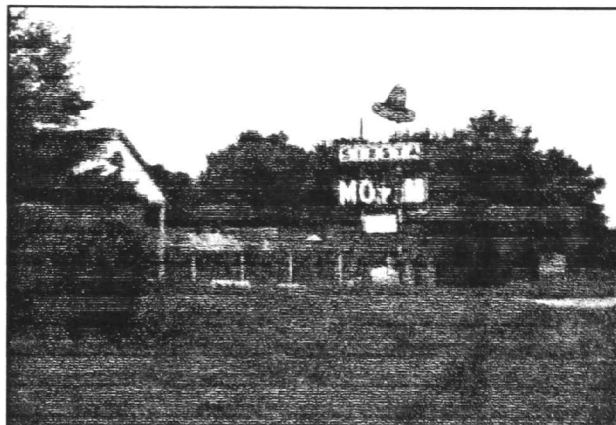


Fig. 9 Ruins, Siesta Motel. A typical motel left derelict alongside Highway 301 because of Interstate 95. Fifty-four miles north of Statesboro. Author's photo.

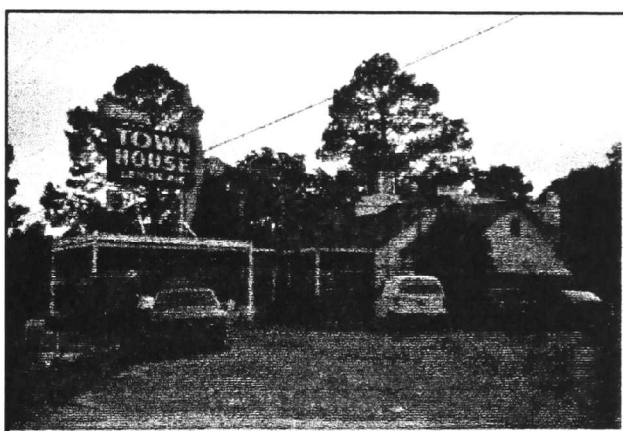


Fig. 10 Town House Restaurant. Some businesses still exhibit neon signs that speak of the 1950s. Author's photo.

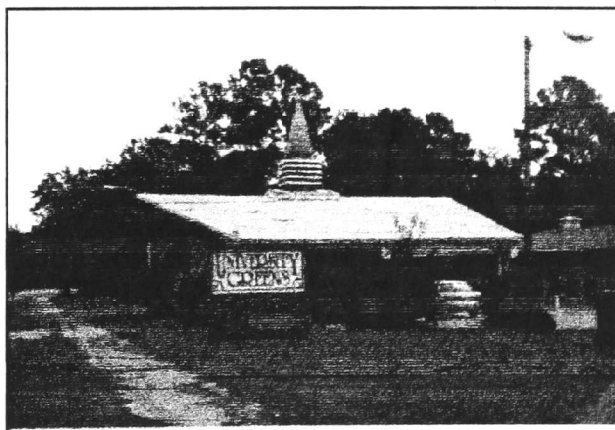


Fig. 11 Interstate Adaptations on U. S. 301. From HoJos to motel office building. Author's photo.

interviewed would drive four hours round trip for a one-day outing, and ninety-seven percent of those asked would drive one hour; the average distance willingly travelled one way was calculated at 125 miles.³⁵ These figures indicated that Bulloch County was well situated whether factoring mileage or time to draw weekend visitors from as far away as the middle of the state. The completion of Interstate 16, paradoxically, would make it even easier for those residents of central Georgia to travel to the Coastal Empire and possibly draw some visitors from as far away as Atlanta, surely the "Holy Grail" of groups targeting in-state tourists.

The ORRRC also discovered through its interviewing that historic areas were the most appealing sites when it came to travel motivations. In fact, all tourism studies stressed refurbishing a community's historical aspects. Bulloch County's best offering in this category was its once thriving tobacco market. Every summer farmers from the surrounding areas shipped their tobacco harvest to Statesboro's large warehouses for auction. Lavinia Strickland remembers the annual tobacco festival as the biggest event of the summer; each year it was kicked off with a large parade.³⁶ According to tourism studies, recapturing the region's farming past might draw many visitors, especially because travelers typically showed interest in the agricultural products of the area they stopped in. Visitors from the North "enjoyed coming through the countryside, getting an education by what they saw growing", remembers Carroll Blankenship. "All of this being so new to

³⁵Sanders, *Tourism in the Georgia Southern Area*, Sect. V, 9.

³⁶Lavinia Bryant Strickland, interview by author, 19 February 1995, tape recording, Bulloch County Oral History Project, Statesboro, Georgia, tape nos. BC33DM and BC34DM.

them and they found this being so different from what they had been educated or what they had heard about all their life about Georgia."³⁷ While not on the scale of Tifton's Georgia Agrirama, which boasted an entire complex of historic nineteenth-century agricultural and village buildings, Bulloch County indeed had its own agricultural past to show to the interested.

Other attractions for tourists included establishing areas for such common outdoor activities as hunting and fishing, which might draw outdoorsmen. Again, Statesboro had a historical connection to just such an endeavor. The Marsh Hunting Preserve was a favorite spot for vacationers in the 1950s. Again, Mrs. Strickland remembers: "people [flew] in to our little airport from other states . . . to go hunting there and they would send their dogs down to be trained by the Marshes."³⁸

Cultural events were also a fertile arena of tourist interest. Statesboro was very well-equipped to tap into this area of activity, thanks to Georgia Southern College. Sporting events, musical concerts, lectures, and institutions like the College Museum provided a year-round atmosphere of diversity in Statesboro and Bulloch County that was unrivaled anywhere else in the region outside of Savannah. Increased promotional advertising, which the various vacation studies found to be surprisingly lacking, could certainly draw interested travelers.

³⁷Blankenship, interview.

³⁸Lavinia Bryant Strickland, interview by author, 11 December 1996, tape recording with transcript.

Nevertheless, no matter what events might draw folks to the Statesboro community, if the town could not handle the crowd, all was for naught. If travel and movement were not easy for tourists, it is unlikely that they would stay or return in the future. One study even suggested creating tourist parking spaces and creating signs clearly indicating tourism areas.³⁹ With these admonishments in mind, in 1968 the Georgia Southern Area Planning and Development Commission began a wide-ranging probe that examined all transportation systems in the eastern part of the state.⁴⁰ One target of improvement was Statesboro's congestion problems at certain Highway 301 intersections inside the city limits. Once the study was completed, the Statesboro Chamber of Commerce created the U. S. 301 Study Committee to inspect the traffic problems downtown and present its recommendations to the city. In November of 1971, the committee presented its findings amid bitter opposition of downtown merchants. A press conference scheduled to outline information gleaned from a study conducted by a traffic engineer of the State Highway Department was invaded by the merchants voicing their opposition to the recommendations of the State. While the local Study Committee had not acted upon any data collected by the Highway Department, the merchants felt so threatened that they immediately swung into action.

Downtown merchants feared that changes in traffic flow would make it more difficult for shoppers to easily drive downtown and find adequate parking. While the

³⁹Thompson, *Tourism in the Altamaha Area*, 33.

⁴⁰"Transportation Study for Area Approved; Will Take Three Years," *Bulloch Herald and Bulloch Times*, 19 December 1968, p. 1.

study encouraged removing parking spaces around the entrance to Georgia Southern College in favor of a two-lane road that included a central turning lane, the most critical area of change was in the center of downtown Statesboro, long a traffic problem. The engineer's report made several suggestions for alleviating congestion, either by eliminating existing traffic lights and left-hand turns in favor of a series of one-way streets that radiated away from Main Street, or by replacing existing traffic lights with actuated lights and the elimination of some left-hand turns that hindered traffic.⁴¹ Max Lockwood, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, assured the concerned merchants that no action was being considered at that time and their concerns would receive due consideration. But Lockwood firmly believed the time for talking about improving Highway 301 was long past; change was now absolutely necessary. Ever since the 1950s, concern for downtown business and desire for improved tourism flow had competed in Statesboro. "We don't want to set the uptown merchants against the tourist industry or anybody," Lockwood said. "We're interested in the improvement of traffic conditions on 301 for the benefit of all the businessmen in Statesboro . . . [but the] congestion on 301 is going to get worse and worse unless we do something about it." Lockwood was so determined to change Highway 301 that when the Study Committee was created, he presented them with an old stack of files collected by previous 301-centered committees

⁴¹These turns especially slowed traffic in light of the fact that Main Street had not been widened to include the existing left-hand turn lane.

and stated, "If this committee is just going to add to those files, it might as well be disbanded now."⁴²

Issues within Statesboro's city limits were the result of recent traffic count increases for Highway 301, thereby bringing the problem of congestion to the forefront. By the end of 1971, the Bulloch County Travel Industry prepared to construct an 800 square-foot sign at the Highway 301-Interstate 95 interchange at Santee, South Carolina, where the completed portion of the Interstate ended. The sign encouraged travelers to reroute to Highway 301 through Georgia, proclaiming it the "Recommended Route to Disney World."

Indeed, it was the opening of that tourist mecca, Walt Disney World, that caused a mini-renaissance of tourist traffic on Highway 301 and awakened the hopes of businesses along the roadway. The 301-95 interchange opened in September 1971 (just in time for the October 1971 opening of Disney World) to much local optimism. Lockwood believed that this section of connecting road would allow Highway 301 to recapture "the fifty percent plus per cent of the traffic lost to U. S. 17 over the past decade."⁴³ Since the State of South Carolina also estimated that full completion of Interstate 95 would not come

⁴²"Detailed Study of 301 Intersections Scheduled," *Statesboro Herald*, 15 September 1971, p. 1; "Uptown Businessmen Oppose 301 Study," 15 November 1971, *Statesboro Herald*, p. 1, 2; "Action to Save U. S. 301 Urged," *Statesboro Herald*, 30 July 1971, p. 1.

⁴³"Plans Finalized to Erect Sign near Santee, S. C." *Statesboro Herald*, 17 December 1971, p. 1; "Opening of I-95 Sector may Boost Local Economy," *Statesboro Herald*, 10 September 1971, p. 1.

until 1976, Bulloch County hoped to gain up to twenty million additional tourist dollars from the estimated ten million visitors expected to visit the Magic Kingdom annually.

While there was a general sense of optimism among Statesboro's tourist-oriented businessmen and a long-standing faith in the economic draw of Highway 301, not all were sure that Disney was their salvation. Mrs. Betty Franklin, owner of the Crossroads Motel and Franklin's Restaurant, was reservedly hopeful that the opening of the massive tourist attraction might increase business. "It's not going to make us millions, or jam our highway," she stated cautiously, "but it could increase our business three times what it is now." Charles Bryant sounded a more pessimistic note. "I'm not trying to build up false hopes," he said. "I don't think Disney World will do anything near what these people expect. . . . "I hope we don't get a false alarm or a pie in the sky if we get a short spurt of increased business because it won't be permanent. The best we can hope for is to temporarily get the traffic that comes off 95 at Santee."⁴⁴

Another tourist improvement that excited some but not others was the Groveland Lake project. This undertaking involved the construction of a dam on the Canoochee River below the mouth of Lott's Creek, creating a man-made freshwater lake that would provide a very large tourist attraction for eighteen counties in eastern Georgia. According to data, this enterprise could bring significant tourist money to the region. The ORRRC conducted a National Recreation survey, which targeted areas that vacationers commonly looked for when in search of vacationing possibilities, and found that forty-four percent of

⁴⁴"Will Tourist Attraction Boost Economy?" *Statesboro Herald*, 17 September 1971, p. 1, 3.

vacationers preferred water-based recreation over any other type. While southeastern Georgia could offer the coast to these travelers, there were few water areas of any size in Bulloch County or the area along the 301 Corridor. Groveland Lake would provide an area for fishing, water-skiing, sun-bathing, picnicking, and other water-related activities.⁴⁵

The lake project, as much as Disney World, was viewed by some as the region's answer to tourism concerns, while others deplored the effects of developing the area as well as its chances of making a profit. The Citizens for Groveland constituted the official body of the former group and included some surprising individuals. For example, Joe Burkhalter, a Claxton businessman, was enthusiastically for Groveland Lake even though its boundaries would consume half of his family farm! The Lake's supporters believed that the attraction would provide much needed employment diversity in eastern Georgia and serve to keep the young from automatically moving to urban areas in search of opportunity. Others, however, like the Canoochee River Valley Association, argued that Groveland Lake constituted a "human tragedy and an ecological disaster." Not only would the creation of a massive man-made lake drive individuals from their homes, uproot churches, and necessitate the removal of cemeteries, it threatened local indigenous plant life and possibly would encourage weed and mosquito populations. They also wondered if the \$16 million dollar price tag on the construction of the dam alone would push the cost of the enterprise so high that profit would be a distant if not tenuous goal. The Groveland Lake project died in the summer of 1974. As more opposition to resettlement rose,

⁴⁵"Report on Tourism Study Alerts Area along U. S. 301 to Plan for Future," *Bulloch Herald and Bulloch Times*, 25 April 1968, p. 1A; Sanders, *Tourism in the Georgia Southern Area*, Sect. V, 7.

funding dropped. Indeed since 1972 the project had operated on funds left over from appropriations made by the Georgia General Assembly since 1969. In late June the Groveland Lake Authority was dissolved formally, signalling an end to another possible tourism solution. Its supporters returned over \$33,000 of unused funds to the State Treasury with a warning to those counties that fought hardest to stop the lake's creation. Again, dire prediction of the affects of Interstate 95 were invoked.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, within Statesboro, improvements continued to alleviate traffic problems. New synchronized traffic lights were installed from Parrish Street, north of courthouse square, and at Jones Avenue near the location of City Hall. Downing Musgrove, newly appointed head of the Georgia DOT, pledged his commitment to lessening the impact of the Interstate on Highway 301 through more four-laning and increased by-pass construction. While many had long opposed a by-pass around Statesboro, a few began supporting such a plan, hoping to divert cumbersome truck traffic around the town, thereby increasing the speed of movement within town. Optimists also pointed to new motel and restaurant growth in Statesboro, saying "[t]hese investors don't expect the big tourist pipeline that is Highway 301 to be closed down to a trickle."⁴⁷

⁴⁶Randolph Murray, "Groveland Lake will be Salvation," *Statesboro Herald*, 3 April 1972, p. 1; Murray, "Groveland Lake will be a Disaster," *Statesboro Herald*, 4 April 1972, p. 1; "Groveland Lake Project Future to be Considered," *Statesboro Herald*, 24 June 1974, p. 1; David Merrefield, "Groveland Project Dead: Authority Dissolved Unanimously," *Statesboro Herald*, 28 June 1974, p. 1.

⁴⁷"Synchronization of Lights Okayed," *Statesboro Herald*, 9 November 1972, p. 1; "Musgrove Pledges his Support to Ease I-95 Economic Impact," *Statesboro Herald*, 4 June 1973, p. 2; "Now is Time to Begin Counter-Action to I-95," *Statesboro Herald*, 19 June 1973, p. 4.

Yet even amid these spurts of optimistic fervor, portents arose that forecast a grimmer future for the historic road. In October 1973, word arrived that the National Highway 301 Association was defunct. The local chapter had no official notification, said member Carroll Blankenship, other than a returned dues check and a September letter from the national president, Dan Boone. Ironically, the highway's representative group was now combined with a group promoting Interstate 95 called the Eastern Travel Association. Blankenship expressed concern that while the ETA might be able to represent both roadways north of Santee, South Carolina, at that point its efforts would be less effective as the two roads diverge to follow disparate paths. Blankenship preferred to form a separate organization than receive only partial support from the ETA.⁴⁸ Even though efforts continued to make it easier for tourists to travel through Statesboro, without improvements in tourist attractions, travelers would largely by-pass the area no matter how well the road was designed. Tourists interviewed confirmed this state of mind, saying that only when they crossed the border separating Georgia and Florida did they begin looking for things to see and do, feeling that their vacation has finally begun.

"Too many of the pass-through travelers still consider a significant portion of the [East Georgia] area to be part of the road rather than part of the vacation," claimed one study. "With the completion of the Interstate system this problem will have an added dimension. These broad bands of concrete and asphalt, with their reduced opportunities to exit, enclose the traveler between right-of-way fences and effectively isolate him from

⁴⁸"National 301 Association Dead," *Statesboro Herald*, 31 October 1973, p. 1.

the area as he passes through."⁴⁹ Clearly something had to be done to increase the chances of tourists coming to Statesboro. Researcher Eugene Holshouser claimed that the 1966 average daily tourist volume of traffic in the Statesboro area of 3,251 was in danger of dropping to 1,081 in 1975, factoring in the effects of a completed Interstate 95.⁵⁰ The predictions were dire and Statesboro citizens faced a change in their communities future. The modern aspect of Interstate isolation remains to be examined as well as Statesboro's current efforts to increase the tourist trade while bound within the commonplace reality of the Interstate today.

⁴⁹Sanders, *Tourism in the Georgia Southern Area*, Sect. III, 17, 18.

⁵⁰Eugene C. Holshouser, *Forecast of Vacation Recreation Traffic on Major Georgia Highways*. Travel Research Study No. 10. For the Tourist Division, Georgia Dept. of Industry and Trade. By the Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Graduate School of Business Administration. (Athens: University of Georgia, 1968), 72.

CHAPTER FOUR

Placelessness, Congestion, and Rediscovering Main Street

Imagine a tourist lost in New Orleans. Even in one of America's most distinctive and historic cities, turning off of the Interstate for directions can result in an experience similar to this traveler's recollection: "Despite being good and lost, my expectations of being steeped in the Big Easy ran high. But when I pulled in for direction, a busy intersection with your generic convenience store on one corner, a fast-food joint and a gas station next to a motel on the other, could have, literally, been anywhere in America. Once again I was in Anywhere, U. S. A."¹ Anyone who has travelled the highway system of the United States within the past thirty years has experienced such a franchise-based atmosphere within American communities. Any town of any size has a McDonald's, a Texaco, a Holiday Inn, a Walmart, and other franchised consumer enterprises. Indeed, so commonplace is the franchising of the American community that only when we are deprived of these branded names do we realize their hold on our expectations. Only when travelers have to stay in a locally owned motel and choose among local restaurants do they realize the psychological comforts of a heat lamp-warmed burger: "Drivers could roll off

¹K. T. Berger, *Where the Road and the Sky Collide* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), 157.

I-95 or I-10 wherever they saw the Golden Arches and be sure of exactly what they would find, in terms of both menu and quality."² The spread of brand names has led to a loss of place in America's tourist landscape. Vacationing decor once reflected a region's unique past. But these "motifs . . . of the New England village, the California mission, or the southern plantation," as one writer put it,³ were largely supplanted by branded names, uniforms, insignia, and common expectations. Our anonymous traveler was truly in Anywhere, U. S. A., because franchising replicated the roadside of every commercial area; "chain names are ubiquitous. They do not define places; they are simply increments in a journey between places, and those increments become numbing because [they are] endlessly repeated."⁴ This numbness, as much as the single-minded pursuit of a singular destination via the Interstate system, contributed to the loss of tourism viability of the American small town.

The Statesboro of the tourist-boom years (1950-1973) had not yet lost its distinctiveness. The closest thing to a franchise restaurant within the Statesboro city limits was the Paragon chicken restaurant, which was owned by the Kentucky Fried Chicken corporation. The other restaurants were unique and owned by individuals who lived and

²Christopher Finch, *Highways to Heaven: The AUTO Biography of America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 242.

³James S. Duncan, "The Social Construction of Unreality: An Interactionist Approach to the Tourist's Cognition of Environment" in *Humanistic Geography: Prospectives and Problems*, David Ley and Marwyn S. Samuels, eds. (Chicago: Maaroufa Press, Inc., 1978), 279.

⁴Finch, *Highways to Heaven*, 11. See also John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

worked in Bulloch County. Travelers who sat down to eat in Statesboro could choose to sample Franklin's Restaurant's "The World's Worst Apple Pie" (billed on the menu as "The pie that doesn't live up to its name.") or Mrs. Bryant's Kitchen's "125 mile breakfast", which consisted of eggs scrambled with pork brains, choice of grits or hashbrowns, toast, and coffee.⁵ Such visitors to a southern community like Statesboro would have passed by agricultural fields as they drove from the outskirts of town on the regional highway before entering into the commercial downtown district. Thus travelers witnessed first-hand the transformation of the South, from its farming past into a more auto-centered, commercial and industrial future. A visitor was an eyewitness to historic changes.

The atmosphere experienced by outsiders was a southern one, from homemade dishes in the restaurants to local flowers adorning the dressers in the hotel rooms. While some tourism operators offered a stereotypical, hollow regionalism in their accommodations, you could still discover a sense of place particular to that community. In Georgia travelers might find a local motel that hoped to evoke something from *Gone With the Wind*, but they could also enjoy the unique beauty of blooming dogwood trees and azalea blossoms in springtime. Such local atmosphere drew tourists to an area for its unique history, its spectacular arts festival, or something that set it apart--uniquely its own.

The Interstates connecting the major cities made it easier than ever to live in surrounding suburban areas and commute to work in the metropolis, encouraging a

⁵Menu, Franklin's Restaurant, Statesboro; Lavinia B. Strickland, Fifty-fifth wedding anniversary scrapbook presented to Charles and Marguerite Bryant, 15 August 1988, vol. 1.

decline in the importance of the Central Business District (CBD) as the main avenue of commerce. As James Flink so cogently pointed out in *The Car Culture*, the opening of much wider trading areas owing to the increased mobility afforded by the automobile encouraged a weakening of local stores and shops because of competition and variety. In large cities, the existing corporate department stores sought large plots of cheaper land on the city's outskirts. Thus, the stores captured the attention of commuters entering the area on the arterial highways surrounding the city and offered them plentiful parking right next to the entrance--not possible in the crowded CBD downtown. In medium-sized cities like Statesboro, merchants in the CBD moved to the periphery and began specializing in a single line of merchandise rather than maintaining the former practice of offering a variety of goods and services.⁶ These individual market stores eventually congregated into strip-malls or the very large mall complexes that came to dominate consumer activity by the 1980s.⁷ Local shops did not have the advantage of appealing to a mass audience through national advertising and therefore were rarely successful in drawing any economic support (except for sporadic billboard traffic) from visitors outside the area. In this way, the CBD--once the heart of a town's economic fortunes--gave way to an economy focused upon the outskirts of towns, via mall stores relying upon the automobile to bring customers from town as well as from outlying areas. As researcher James Lemly observed in 1958:

⁶James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1975), 178.

⁷For an in-depth examination of the growth of malls and the resultant effects of consumerism in the United States, see "Forum" *American Historical Review* 101 (October 1996), 1049-121.

the American public is fast becoming aware that divided highways of modern design are providing a new type of main street for the nation. . . . By providing better means of movement we are also encouraging the development of better shopping and commercial areas nearby. As we construct these main arteries we are shifting from low use, general purpose roads to special purpose roadways which can provide much better service in our urbanized and motorized environment.⁸

Writer and automobile enthusiast Christopher Finch shed additional light upon the rise of a new Main Street away from the CBD. He emphasized that these commercial strips grew at a very quick pace due to the power and backing of the franchised corporation. These "highly concentrated" shopping strips that arose near Interstate interchanges "did not grow gradually in slow increments of Mom and Pop businesses but rather mushroomed overnight, fueled by the capital available to chain stores such as Sears and Safeway and by the explosion of franchise outlets."⁹ Such transformation to specialized roadways was a dangerous and costly shift for small towns not fortunate enough to be located upon such a route. This pattern of abandoning the local by-ways and their attendant stores for more exotic and quicker paths was not a creation of only the Interstate system, though this certainly cemented its most pervasive and longest-lasting effect. A similar movement occurred in immediate post-World War II America when

⁸James H. Lemly, *Expressways Influence on Land Use and Value, Atlanta 1941-1956* (Atlanta: Georgia State College of Business Administration. Research paper series no. 10, 1958), 2.

⁹Finch, *Highways to Heaven*, 236.

turnpikes first became available to motorists in the Northeast. "Few people in the 40s and 50s seem to have given much thought to the small towns and colorful Mom and Pop businesses that were by-passed by the turnpike and consigned to oblivion," remarked Finch. He continues prophetically that "the creation of instant backwaters was to become a pattern, and already in the first post-war road-building boom, hundreds of diners and sidewalk filling stations vanished or were reduced to operating at a subsistence level."¹⁰



Fig. 12 Franchising Hits Home. Bryant's Hotel has now been converted into a Day's Inn chain. Author's photo.

The changes wrought by franchising are best seen in hindsight. At the time, towns were excited to acquire brand-name establishments, as this showed signs of economic growth and community acceptance of modern post-war life. Small southern towns pursued such change to diversify from an economic past dominated by agriculture. "[P]rogress could be measured in terms of the appearance of fast-food 'chain' restaurants," wrote historian James C. Cobb in the *New Georgia Guide*. Only later did some worry that

¹⁰Finch, *Highways to Heaven*, 187-88.

community distinctiveness was being relinquished. Letting in one franchise encouraged others to arrive and soon, local stores began to fall prey to the power of corporate identity. "Although I was satisfied that the opening of a McDonald's meant my hometown had definitely arrived . . ." Cobb continued, "a Walmart store seems to bring dramatic alterations to the shops and pace of life in the community where it is located." The power of a superstore affected much more than the budgets of individual consumers, he realized. It changed the very geography of a town, stretching out its economic tentacles in the same way portrayed in cartoon depictions of the Standard Oil octopus in the early twentieth century. "Once the center of social as well as economic activity," he concluded, "downtown streets or the courthouse square are noticeably quieter because many shoppers have already made their purchases. . . . The result is a fundamental alteration in traditional patterns of economic and social interaction at the community level."¹¹

As a microcosm of this fundamental transformation wrought by the Interstate system, Statesboro came to put much less emphasis upon tourism than it once did, enjoying and cultivating instead the more recent economic strengths of light industry and the rise of Georgia Southern University. But, the town has not totally turned its back on its "Tourist City" past. Recently, there has been a significant revival of interest in drawing tourism to Statesboro, especially via the old pathway of Highway 301. While it is unlikely the majority of tourists heading to Florida will divert themselves from the Interstates to drive down regional roads and through small towns, the best hope for local tourist

¹¹Georgia Humanities Council, *The New Georgia Guide* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 70.

boosters seems to be in appealing to the elderly who once knew the gentler methods of tourist travel before the dominance of the Interstate system.

Carroll Blankenship sees this as the primary market for Statesboro's future tourist growth:

There are literally hundreds of thousands of retirees on Florida's Gold Coast who were natives of the North and travel back and forth to their native homes, three, four, and more times every year, visiting friends and family. Many of these are the same ones, who just a few short years ago just dearly loved to travel [Highway] 301, and these are the same people who now are frightened to death of the super slab, the I-95 monster. These are the people that would be a ready built-in market for Highway 301.¹²

Some seniors, uncomfortable with the speedy, frenzied pace of Interstate travel, might look for the calmer travel ways of their youth, enjoying a leisurely pace, stopping at small communities to inquire about crops, flowers, and other natural elements unique to the region. In short, these folks could reinvent the travel habits of the "pidling" [sic] tourist--spurning the intensity of purpose and vacationing goals of the "scat" Interstate traveler. Such curiosity seekers had once stopped to ask questions about the various crops and get a little education about the South. "You know, a lot of people thought pecans grew in the ground," said Blankenship. Seeking answers to such riddles, these folks sought out local establishments, describing for example a plant growing in a nearby field and asking for

¹²Carroll Blankenship, Address to Statesboro Chamber of Commerce, copy of speech given to author, 7 December 1992.

help identifying what it was. "It was quite an educational process," Blankenship remembers. "[I] couldn't believe that some people didn't know what a cow was."¹³

Jackie Harrington, director of the Highway 301 Visitor's Center located on the South Carolina-Georgia border, confirms this phenomenon. "[T]he latest trend has been elderly people," she said, "retired people, and people who are tired of the Interstates--that want to see something other than more concrete and other vehicles." It seems that these individuals desire to reacquaint themselves with the America they bypassed for thirty years. "They like to see the real, genuine Southern lifestyle. They like to go through the little towns and see the homes and see how the people live, what the industries are. And also they like to see crops growing," Harrington recalled. "We hear this, I'd say, from seventy-five percent of the people who travel this route. They are so glad to get off of the Interstates."¹⁴ At a recent meeting of the Rural Economic Development Conference, held in Statesboro and attended by representatives of several county surrounding Highway 301, the consensus was that the majority of travelers along Highway 301 who stop in the area are retirees. The group also agreed that the main focus of any tourism revitalization along Highway 301 should center around senior citizens.¹⁵ Clearly, while the Interstates have

¹³Carroll Blankenship, interview by author, tape recording with transcript, 23 September, 1996..

¹⁴Jackie Harrington, interview by author, tape recording with transcript, 12 September 1996, Georgia Visitors Center, U. S. Highway 301 north of Sylvania, GA.

¹⁵"Leaders Want Revitalized U. S. 301," *Statesboro Herald*, 11 December 1996, p. 1A, 8A. John Danneman, manager of the Savannah AAA office, noted that there was no evidence to indicate that senior citizens are intentionally trying to avoid the Interstate (telephone conversation with author, 15 May 1996). However, there is a strong sense within the community that any efforts to improve tourism on Highway 301 must begin

become an indispensable part of our transportation system, the great crush of cars on the road and the accelerated speeds allowed have frightened some travelers away.

This overburdening of the Interstates, especially around many major cities, has resulted from the nation's reliance upon the automobile as the overwhelming choice of transportation for everyday movement. When the automobile came into widespread popularity in the 1920s, trolleys and early subway systems within cities provided cheap and reliable public transportation options for city dwellers. Trolleys even provided access to the first suburbs that grew around the immediate boundaries of American cities. Automobiles, however, granted city dwellers and suburbanites the freedom to live farther from the crowded and dirty cities and still enjoy the cultural and employment opportunities therein. Automobiles encouraged individual transportation that led to the decline of public transportation in the United States and put ever-increasing demands upon the roadway infrastructure of America.¹⁶

When Interstate construction figured so heavily in the news stories of the 1960s, it seemed very unlikely that the system would prove unable to accommodate the press of American automobiles. As America grew to economic dominance following World War II, the American consumer increasingly embraced the automobile as an essential part of everyday life. The middle class fled to the suburbs and relied upon the auto to get them to work and for grocery shopping and weekend trips. Such developments only accelerated

with the senior's market.

¹⁶See David J. St. Clair, *Motorization of the American Cities* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986).

what the President's Research Committee on Social Trends had noted in 1933, that an "automobile psychology" was developing in the United States causing the motorcar to assume a "dominant influence in the life of the individual and he, in a very real sense, has become dependent on it." In 1993, urban planner Peter Calthorpe saw the auto's power within the framework of his occupation: "The car is . . . the defining technology of our built environment. It sets the form of our cities and towns. It dictates the scale of streets, the relationship between buildings, the need for vast parking spaces, and the speed at which we experience our environment." Harry Crews, the author of *Car*, expressed this concept more colloquially: "Everything that's happened in this goddamn country in the last fifty years has happened in, on, around, with, or near a car."¹⁷ The vast Interstate system was the post-war solution to the traffic problems that this transformation engendered. Indeed, the Interstate Highway Act authorized the largest and most expensive public works program in American history in the building of its 41,000 mile system of expressways.

The original civilian intention of the Interstate system was to carry drivers only between and around major cities, depending on smaller feeder roads to lead into the central business district (CBD). Had this remained the case, claimed historian Helen Leavitt, the system would have been completed by its original 1971 deadline and within budget. Leavitt claims, however, that the design for funding the Interstates as prescribed

¹⁷U. S. President, Committee on Social Trends, *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933): 1357-58. In Flink, *Car Culture*, 131; Berger, *Road and Sky Collide*, 194, 107.

in the Highway Revenue Act of 1956 (ninety percent coming from the Federal government and ten percent from the States, and derived from monies collected from user fees such as gasoline taxes) proved to be too much of a lure for urban city planners, eager to reshape their cities.¹⁸ Some Interstates were thus diverted from the outskirts to the heart of downtown, forcing an expansion of inner-city roads which greatly increased the commuter congestion within the CBD. A negatively reinforcing cycle resulted: as highway lanes increased to supply easier traffic, more and more drivers abandoned older routes and flocked to these improved roads, quickly overcrowding them. Rather than turn toward public transportation solutions, reliance upon the automobile continued, perpetuating the cycle--"as demand [rose] the solution [was] thought to be more roads which brings more cars."¹⁹

The massive show of support shown the Interstate system by the federal government was a result of World War II. Once the federal government only envisioned matching state funds fifty-fifty. The United States entrance into World War II in 1941 allowed for an increase of the federal funding commitment to seventy-five percent, with reasoning that the Interstate system was critical to military purpose, such as unobstructed and fleet transportation of supplies and troops. When congressman George Fallon proposed the Highway Trust Fund as a means of providing the large sums of money needed to fund construction, detractors questioned taxing the public directly for the

¹⁸Helen Leavitt, *Superhighway--Superhoax* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1970), 1.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 8; Thurley A. Bostick, "The Automobile in American Daily Life," *Public Roads* 32 (December 1963): 241.

creation and upkeep of these roads when studies showed that the vast majority of auto trips were of very short duration--suburban commutes to the CBD.²⁰ Some argued that the Trust Fund should be funded only by commercial freight carriers undertaking constant highway trips of extended distance. Trust Fund supporters, however, stressed to the Senate subcommittee appointed to debate the matter that "the taxpaying public owed it to various highway interests to invest in the enlarged highway system so they could continue to make a living and prevent unemployment." They went on to placate the committee with assurances that "the program could only be beneficial to everyone . . . there could be no bad effects."²¹ Unfortunately, little consideration was given to the fate of communities that were enjoying significant tourist income along the existing regional highways.

Coping with the realities of Interstate travel has brought about changes in Statesboro with which the tourism boosters of the past might have taken issue. For instance, Statesboro has recently been encircled with a by-pass which now shunts traffic around the town. But unlike the situation in the late 1960s when a proposed by-pass would hopefully relieve the traffic congestion arising from out-of-town visitors, the new by-pass was built to accommodate the great increase in local traffic, thanks mainly to population enlargement and substantial enrollment at Georgia Southern University.²²

²⁰In the mid-1950s about nine miles one way and within a twenty-five mile radius of metropolitan areas. Leavitt, *Superhighway--Superhoax*, 8.

²¹Ibid., 51, 42, 50, 40.

²²The Statesboro city population according to the 1970 census was 14,616. By 1980 the population had only increased to 14,866. In 1990, however, the city population jumped to 15,854. The enrollment at Georgia Southern also showed marked increases over roughly the same period. Fall quarter enrollment in 1974 was 6,125 and fluxuated by

Although, the downtown area is no longer the economic center of the community, it remains civically and economically viable, having mainly governmental offices, lawyers, and a number of small shops. The main consumer focus of Statesboro has shifted to other areas, especially the Statesboro Mall northeast of downtown.

In the 1960s, by-passing seemed to be the death knell of small downtown areas, as illustrated by what occurred in Sylvania, Georgia, for example. But there were exceptions. One California town in 1951 enjoyed improvements thanks to routing traffic around its congested areas. Overall retail sales increased forty-eight percent, not due to outsiders, but because members of surrounding communities were now more eager to shop in the town since congestion had decreased. This by-passed town now focused on becoming a regional city rather than relying on out-of-town visitors, who were more inclined to pass through anyway.²³ Such a shift of focus from attracting outsiders to encouraging regional growth was an important survival strategy encouraged by Interstate impact studies. One such study declared that along Georgia's Highway 301 corridor, Statesboro and Jesup were destined to be *growth centers*, "places of regional economic

150 students every year until the Fall of 1986. The enrollment that quarter was 7,611 and increased by an average of 1,000 every year until 1989-1990. That year, in part to a change to University status, the Fall quarter enrollment jumped by about 2,000 students. Statistics from: Bureau of the Census, *General Population Characteristics, Georgia, 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1971); Bureau of the Census, *General Population Characteristics, Georgia, 1980* (Washington, D.C., 1982); "U.S. Gazetteer," <www.census.gov/cgi-bin/gazetteer?city=&state=&zip=30458>, 14 March 1997; *University System of Georgia Information Digest, 1983-1984* (Atlanta: Board of Registrar of the University System of Georgia, 1984), 14; "10 Year History by Gender," in "G.S.U. 1995-1996 Fact Book," <www.gasou.edu>.

²³"By-Passed Cities Registered Higher Business Income," *The American City* 66 (December 1951): 143.

activity served by a subregional population which increasingly has sought goods and services in these communities." In just such a fashion, Statesboro has come to exert its own economic influence on the smaller surrounding towns.²⁴

Given such evidence, by-passes are no longer viewed as a detriment to downtown development. Ironically, they seem to be an important aspect of downtown refurbishment by encouraging commercial trucks and other bothersome traffic to detour around a city. Indeed, as one authority put it, "much of Statesboro's charm can be credited to [the] by-pass."²⁵ In 1990, Statesboro joined the ranks of many towns in Georgia, the United States, and Canada that are endeavoring to revive the decaying and ignored downtown areas with architectural refurbishment and planned improvements. Georgia was one of six pilot states to enter the Main Street Program in 1980; its purpose is economic development of the historic downtown center of a community. By-passes assist this goal by clearing out congestion and encouraging an almost park-like atmosphere in downtowns. Refurbished store fronts and eye-catching window displays, specialized boutiques, craft and home decoration stores, and old-timey sandwich and soda shops encourage walking the sidewalks, visiting, and shopping.

Leslie Sharpe, executive director of the Main Street Statesboro program, views the by-pass as a positive good, provided it accomplishes the goals assigned to it and does not cause unwanted losses. In other words, the by-pass assists her efforts to revive the

²⁴Eric Hill Associates, *U. S. 301 Regional Development Study*, Commissioned by the Altamaha Georgia Southern Area Planning and Development Commission, Atlanta: Eric Hill Associates, 1973, 1.

²⁵*New Georgia Guide*, 603.

downtown area if it encourages freight trucks to circle around Statesboro. If travelers also take the by-pass, however, then part of the advantages of refurbishing Main Street is lost. The key to bringing back shoppers to a downtown area is focusing on the themes of history and connection--attacking the bland "placelessness" of franchising. Holiday parades and war monuments as well as the central courthouse are nearly universally located in a city's downtown, creating a certain feeling for that area. Most towns' historical roots are founded in the downtown area and later growth radiated outward from that point. "It belongs to the community," said writer Harold Kalman in a way that shopping malls and roadside strips never can.²⁶

Some of Statesboro's downtown historical landmarks were lost or moved because of growth and progress. A concrete watering trough built in 1905 for horses and mules had been located on the courthouse square. At an undetermined time, the trough was moved to its present location at Triangle Park, the corner of East Main and Savannah Avenue. An old walnut tree, which also had stood on the corner of courthouse square, was a symbol of Statesboro's past. Rumor had it that court was held under its branches before the courthouse was built. But the automobile brought about the demise of the old tree. A petition circulated the town in 1911 to remove the walnut from the roadside curb, citing it as "an obstruction which impedes traffic and endangers life." Many objected to the removal of the tree, but the City Council decided to have it dug up in the middle of the night to avoid protests or other excitement. The wood of the tree was taken to the power

²⁶Harold Kalman, "Canada's Main Street," in *Reviving Main Street*, edited by Deryck Holdsworth (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 7, 4.

plant to provide fuel for generating electricity.²⁷ Such stories as these, as well as the local shops, tie a community to a certain place much more intimately than a collection of stores. This is the sense of place that gives definition to a town.²⁸

Another aspect of downtown revitalization involves recapturing the architecture of the original buildings. Restoring the appearance of facades and renovating interiors are often instrumental in renewing interest in occupying these buildings. Recent architectural work has reclaimed the historic Jaeckel Hotel in downtown Statesboro, restoring the exterior facade and converting the interior into the town's new City Hall. But simply restoring the outer appearances of buildings without taking steps that encourage developers results in a hollow rejuvenation. At the same time, commercial development without regard for heritage and historical place is not much better than building a mall in the suburbs.²⁹ Redeveloping downtown areas is a careful balancing act, especially in smaller towns that have a more intimate tie to the historical roots of a Main Street complex.

Even in larger metropolitan areas, efforts to renew central downtown districts have become very popular, but the corporate influence is much more prevalent there,

²⁷Leodel Coleman, ed. *Statesboro 1866-1966: A Century of Progress* (Statesboro: Bulloch Herald Pub. Co., 1969), 102, 1.

²⁸Archibald's Tavern and Restaurant, a popular eatery on South Main (301 South), even displays on the walls of the main dining room large, historic, framed sepia-toned photographs of scenes of old downtown Statesboro to convey to old timers and newcomers alike just this sense of place.

²⁹John Stewart, "Breathing Life Back into Downtown," in Holdsworth, *Main Street*, 80, 85.

sometimes to the detriment of the CBD's past history. In New York's Times Square, efforts to remove the sex shops and other seamy attractions in favor of more respectable restaurants and theaters have brought new consumer life to the famous West Side. The majority of new enterprises moving in during the past year, however, have a decidedly corporate flavor. From a restaurant with a Marvel Comic's theme to a venture by Disney, Times Square has become another version of what can be seen in most big-city downtown districts--celebrity-backed theme restaurants--with appropriate memorabilia adorning the walls.³⁰

A backlash against the power of corporate chains has begun in some places. Starbucks coffee houses have been targeted for their continued expansion into new markets. Though not a behemoth like Walmart or McDonalds, Starbucks nevertheless has captured the coffee market so assuredly and so quickly that it has caused some tremors in towns primed for the franchise's entrance. As one reporter in *Newsweek* explains, American towns are wary about "retail elephants lumbering into their neighborhoods. It's not just Main Street's fear of the discounter on the edge of town, or frustration with the latest cookie-cutter fast-food joint. The sheer ubiquity of chain stores, no matter how elegant, can be a threat to a town's unique character."³¹

The power of a brand name, with its increased name recognition and the added benefit of being currently enormously popular, has small town citizens worried, not just

³⁰Jerry Adler, "Goodbye, Damon Runyon. Hello, Mickey Mouse," *Newsweek*, 13 May 1996, p. 61.

³¹Jolie Solomon, "Not in My Backyard," *Newsweek*, 16 September 1996, pp. 65-66.

for the locally-owned coffee suppliers but for other aspects of daily life as well. Being the first franchise in an area can generate increased traffic, loss of parking, and a quick and unforeseen influx of outsiders. Despite the fact that many such companies had humble beginnings--Kentucky Fried Chicken originally recreated the unique taste of a particular southern recipe for fried chicken; Starbucks originally intended to capture the charm of Italian coffee bars--their successes, as laudable as they are, create questions of power and community. As franchises increasingly move into small town America, the debate over what determines the distinctive character of that town--its history, its people, the services it offers . . . or hopefully a careful blending of each--will continue.³²

Statesboro is trying to find itself again after the changes generated by Interstate 95. Downtown refurbishment, efforts to resurrect the local 301 Association, renewed discussion of tourism's impact on Bulloch County, and its resultant history--these are all issues currently being discussed in Statesboro today.³³ Revitalizing tourism in Statesboro

³²Ibid., 66. On franchises, see Thomas S. Dicke, *Franchising in America: The Development of a Business Method, 1840-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*; Ray Kroc and Robert Anderson, *Grinding It Out: The Making of McDonald's* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1977); Harry Kursh, *The Franchise Boom: The New Revised Edition* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968); Philip Langdon, *Orange Roofs, Golden Arches: The Architecture of American Chain Restaurants* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Harlan Sanders, *Life as I Have Known It Has been Finger Lickin' Good* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1974); Sandra S. Vance and Roy V. Scott, "Sam Walton and Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.: A Study in Modern Entrepreneurship," *Journal of Southern History* 58 (May 1992), 231-52. See also Warren Belasco, "Toward a Culinary Denominator: The Rise of Howard Johnson's, 1952-1940," *Journal of American Culture* 2 (Fall 1979): 503-18; and Conrad Kottak, "Rituals at McDonald's," *Natural History* 87 (January 1978): 74-83.

³³See "Tourism's Impact Often Overlooked in Bulloch," *Statesboro Herald*, 7 May 1996, p. 4; Erika Anderson, "Statesboro Celebrates National Tourism Week," *The George-Anne*, 9 May 1996, p. 1; Max Lockwood, "Interstate Highways Helped Portions

is a difficult task today. AAA (the American Automobile Association) does not even consider Highway 301 a viable route to recommend to travelers who inquire about routes through Georgia because of the efficiency and speed of the Interstate. However, the recent interest in resurrecting the Highway 301 Association as well as recent experiences with the Olympic Games in Georgia could lead to more concerted effort on tourist issues. Tourism-providers in Statesboro on Highway 301 are ready to focus on the individual, according to Jackie Harrington, director of the State of Georgia Welcome Center, because that is what visitors are looking for. "The people just seem to appreciate that more than anything else in the world, the personal touch and to genuinely welcome them to Georgia. They can't find that on the Interstates. . . . Everyone is busy, busy, busy on the Interstates."³⁴ The future of Statesboro's tourism prospects might lie in this understanding. Emphasizing the tourist traits of Statesboro's past might provide an avenue for future success.

of State, but Left Rural Areas in Ruins," *Statesboro Herald*, 7 August 1996, p. 4; Lockwood, "Interstate Highways Have Devastated Rural Economy," *Statesboro Herald*, 20 August 1996, p. 3; Vicki A. Smith-Davis, "Leaders Want Revitalized U. S. 301," *Statesboro Herald*, 11 December 1996, p. 1A, 8A.

³⁴Harrington interview.

EPILOGUE

From "Tourist City" to Twenty-first Century

Statesboro has seen many changes in the past thirty years. The city has grown from a small rural, county seat town with a small agricultural and teachers' college to a regional growth center, influencing the economic destiny of several surrounding communities. It is blessed with a burgeoning university that serves the entire Southeast and even students from overseas. Statesboro rose above many area communities along U. S. Highway 301 as it struggled to adapt to the changes wrought by the completion of Interstate 95. What made Statesboro different? Why does it continue to flourish while other towns along the Georgia 301 Corridor have stagnated or even declined in recent history?

The primary reason for Statesboro's resilience must be its citizens, who have for many years dedicated themselves to the betterment of their community. For at least half a century the residents of Statesboro have striven to strengthen the economic and welcoming aspects of their town, hoping to attract newcomers and draw travelers.¹ While the town had an initial advantage of possessing a college that generated added income and increased the population, Statesboro has sustained more long-term recognition from its

¹African Americans were not often considered in these deliberations, however.

tourist-centered efforts over the last fifty years. Statesboro is now known as the home of Georgia Southern University, but has long been called "The Tourist City."

This reputation is due to the efforts of many people, from the various Chambers of Commerce to 301 Association members, newspaper editors, restaurant owners, police officers, to "Dogwood" Joe Zetterower. As a 1946 feature in *Ladies Home Journal* indicated, Statesboro accepted the challenges of the post-war era in a very energetic fashion. The new highways opened new avenues of income to a small livestock and agricultural town. Soldiers home from the war embraced the challenge of dealing with a growing population and encouraging new businesses. One local captured the "can-do" attitude of Statesboro: "I was amazed when I got here," he said, "There's no unwillingness here to tear loose on anything."²

This attitude served Statesboro well throughout its tourist-boom years. Community efforts such as putting the tourist first with friendly police, improving roads and constantly striving to widen the 301 route to create continuous movement, as well as the constant diligence of the 301 Association, put Statesboro ahead of other towns along Highway 301. Individual efforts such as Dogwood Joe's desire to beautify the highway, and Leodel Coleman's focus on tourist development typified the desires of people who wanted to put Statesboro first in eastern Georgia. As Dr. Presley recalls, the leadership of

²Public Affairs Department, "Planning Pays Off," *Ladies Home Journal* 68 (June 1951), 196.

Statesboro "had a very strong, vocal set of leaders in the Chamber of Commerce . . . that represented well the interests of the tourist trade."³

Individuals such as Charles Bryant and Police Chief Anderson remembered that the best way to attract outsiders was to present a pleasant welcome to them as they arrived. Bryant and the 301 Association constantly emphasized the rights and privileges of the tourist and the Statesboro police department reciprocated that idea by treating travelers--with the exception of African Americans--with consideration and kindness. While Ludowici preyed upon outsiders, generating a reputation that hurt the entire state of Georgia, Statesboro assisted tourists whenever possible, hoping they would return one day.

Statesboro is no longer viewed as a tourist town, but its historic willingness to meet any challenge and its pride in community promote economic growth. Local business and industry as well as Georgia Southern University are now the foundation of the community's economy.⁴ Today, Statesboro is viewed as a burgeoning city in Georgia. Efforts to revitalize tourism and the local 301 Association are again increasing in Statesboro, focusing now on serving surrounding Georgians first, rather than drawing tourists from Interstate 95. Anyone who comes down 301 will find a different Statesboro than existed in the past. There is not the total commitment to tourism that once existed

³Presley interview.

⁴Light industry such as the Briggs and Stratton motor assembly factory and a Wal-Mart distribution center provide many new opportunities for work in Statesboro today. Today, new motel construction is driven by these industries and commercial travelers, not tourism. Doug Lambert, manager Fairfield Inn, conversation with author, 12 May 1996 and Tommy Chatham, manager Jameson Inn, conversation with author, 13 May 1996.

to see a rise in tourist activity, but even if travelers do come, the experience will be different. The Interstate has caused changes--changes that Statesboro has adapted to, but in a way that makes the past irretrievable.

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