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My Grandfather's Lee Highway

by William Page Johnson, II



Most of the main roads in Fairfax are colonial in origin, necessitated by farmers who needed to get their crops to markets in Alexandria (Little River Turnpike), Occoquan (Chain Bridge Road) and Georgetown (Lee Highway). This is the story of Lee Highway in Fairfax. Naturally, as a road story it is far reaching and replete with many twists and turns.

One hundred years ago, road construction in Northern Virginia was a hot issue. The same as it is in 2008. Arguably, we need better roads to handle the ever increasing volumes of traffic and to maintain economic prosperity. A century ago, the issue was the same, but the rationale was slightly different. In 1910, the automobile was still a rare sight. That year there were just 2,700 cars operating on the dirt roads of Virginia.¹ However, by 1919, the automobile had ceased to be a rarity. Unfortunately, the rural roads of Virginia, which had been fine for slower horse-drawn vehicles, were now completely inadequate for the new *machines*. In good weather, our old country lanes were satisfactory to the early automobile, but



Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA, before improvements. March 1924. Looking NE toward Falls Church. Blake Lane entering Lee Highway to the left is visible in the background. The home of Frank & Wena Gibson is visible in the upper left. Photo courtesy of Lee Hubbard.



Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA, March 2008. Blake Lane entering Lee Highway to the left is visible in the background. Hatmark Branch crosses Lee Highway in the distance. The Citgo Service Station stands where the Gibson home once stood. Photo courtesy of Page Johnson.



Fairfax, Virginia, March 2008-

Greetings from the President--



As I start my year as President of HFCI I want to thank all members for their continuing support of HFCI's mission to preserve the historic resources of the City of Fairfax. It is an honor to be your President for the coming year.

This year will see some very important developments for the City and for HFCI. Perhaps the most important will be the opening of the Interpretive Center at Bleinham in the fall of 2008. Bleinham is a truly unique historic resource where you can make a direct connection with soldiers who served in the Civil War. In viewing the graffiti on the walls of this house, you get a sense of the individuals who were fighting in this conflict. The Interpretive Center will make these writings as well as the history of this wonderful house accessible to all. Working with the City's Department of Historic Resources, HFCI hopes to make the opening of the Center a memorable event.

Another new project we are undertaking is the development of an oral history taken from our oldest resident. This project is being spearheaded by Sandra Wilbur. We'd appreciate your help in identifying additional residents who could be interviewed about their experiences and knowledge of the City.

On April 26, the Saturday evening Walking Tours of the City will resume. Hildie Carney did a wonderful job organizing these tours last year and they proved to be very popular and a great way to highlight the City and its history. The Walking Tours will leave from the Moore House on Chain Bridge Road. We are always in need of additional docents for the tours so if you are interested in this unique opportunity, please let us know.

Finally, HFCI will continue its efforts to make certain that the City's historic resources are given full consideration as development continues in the City. We plan to actively participate in the review of the

Comprehensive Plan as well as to address specific development proposals that may negatively impact our historic buildings and sites. We hope that all of you will continue to support us in this effort.

David Pumphrey



Council Reporter

"Mayor Chapman and Councilman Whalen appointed a Committee to inquire into complaints about dumping trash on Town streets.

In connection with the above mentioned matter, Councilman Sherwood gave the council permission to establish a Town dumping ground on that part of his property known as 'Mistletoe Hollow', a part of the old Riley farm, situated about one mile west of the Town of Fairfax."

Minutes of the Town of Fairfax Council, February 3, 1930.



Improving Streets

"The[Fairfax] Town Council, at its meeting Monday night, authorized the placing of sand and gravel on Court Street [Sager Avenue] from Payne Street [Chain Bridge Road] to Mechanics [University Drive], and on Mechanics street from Court to Main. The placing of sand and gravel on Cedar Avenue, from the railroad track to the fair grounds [Paul VI High School] was also authorized. This will improve these roadways much to the delight of those who have to use them. The sum of \$200 was also voted for use on the road leading Mr. Elihu Burritt's[Roberts Road] and the money was turned over to Mr. Robert Stump to be expended."

Fairfax Herald, May 9, 1924, p.3.

when it rained or snowed, things quickly turned to mud. As incredible as it may seem, before 1920 there were no paved roads in Virginia to speak of, except those in larger cities.

In the early years of the 20th century, road construction was strictly a local issue. For more than a century, Virginia property owners were responsible for the maintenance of the roads which fronted along their property. This method, which utilized pick, shovel and, perhaps, a primitive horse-drawn drag, was haphazard at best and proved woefully inadequate as the automobile made its debut. To address this, in 1906, the Virginia General Assembly adopted the State Convict Road Force Act creating the Virginia *Chain Gang*.² This act allowed local courts the discretion to order anyone convicted of a felony, and duly sentenced to serve a minimum of two years in the state penitentiary, to serve their sentence, in lieu of confinement, at hard labor on the public roads. This supplied localities with a reliable source of unskilled labor.

The Virginia legislature also created the Virginia Highway Commission in 1906.³ However, due to a serious lack of funding, progress was slow. In fact, the first state appropriation of for actual construction funding was not made until 1909. The \$25,000 appropriated seemed like an afterthought as it came with the caveat "...out of any money in the state treasury not otherwise appropriated."⁴

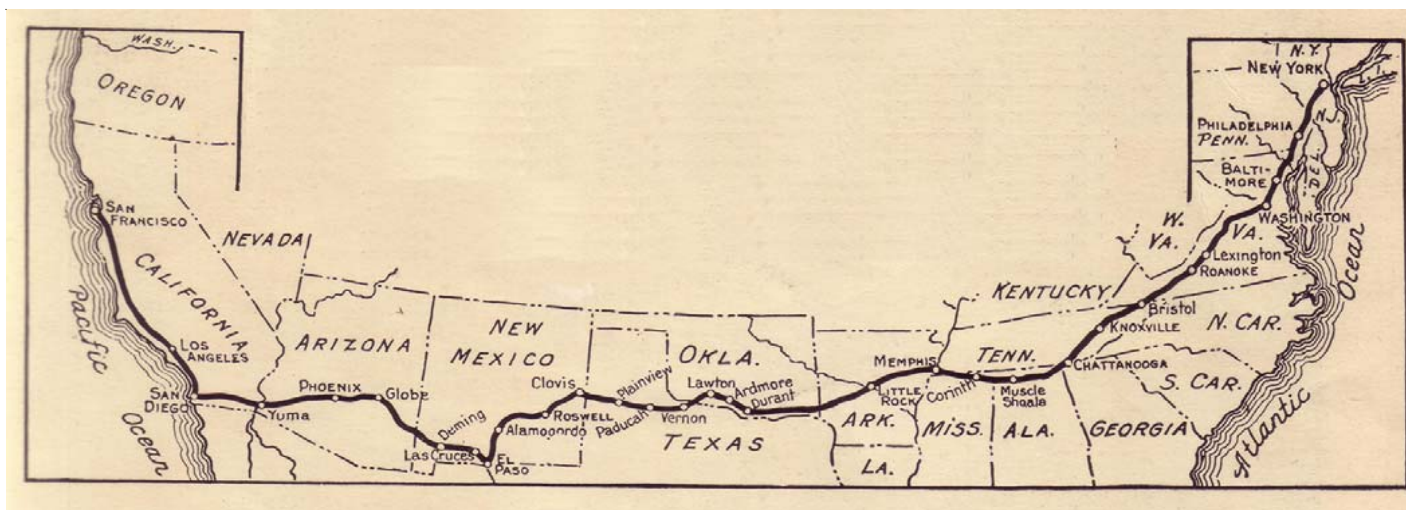
In 1918, the Virginia General Assembly passed a road bill creating a State Highway System. Roads designated

by the State Highway Commission as *State Highways* would be adopted into the new interconnected system of state roads. Once adopted into the system, the state would then assume all responsibility for construction and future maintenance. On paper this was great, but the lack of funding from the state would prove to be a persistent problem.⁵

In March 1920, Virginia State Senator A. Willis Robertson, father of future televangelist, Pat Robertson, introduced a bill which addressed the funding issue in the short term. The *Robertson Act*,⁶ as it came to be known, allowed localities to raise funds through local bond referenda. The localities then advanced those funds to the State Highway Commission who would then construct the roads. The commission would then repay the monies advanced as funds became available.

The Lee Highway National Auto Trail

Simultaneously, at the national level, long-distance road advocates had been lobbying for more federal funds for national roads. A major boost came in 1919 when the U.S. Army, who through their experience of World War I, saw the need for a good network of national roads. They initiated the first transcontinental motor convoy utilizing vehicles that the U.S. Army had used in the recent war in Europe. The convoy covered the distance of 3,251 miles, from Washington, DC, to San Francisco, CA, in the then record time of 2 months at an average speed of 6 miles per



Map of Robert E. Lee Highway, National Auto Trail. Views Along Lee Highway, © 1923, The Lee Highway Association.
Courtesy Lee Hubbard.

hour. The official spokesman for the convoy was Dr. Samuel M. Johnson an ordained minister and a Good Roads advocate. Dr. Johnson spoke to crowds along the way in support of a bill that would establish a federal highway commission to build national roads.

*"We are at the beginning of a new era of American progress and history. Now that we have finished the job on the other side [in Europe], the next great job will be the improvement of the highways so that automobiles and motor trucks can be operated on them economically."*⁷

The event was highly publicized and well attended all along the route. An estimated 3,000,000 Americans directly witnessed this event. A young army officer, Lt. Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who took part in the convoy, would later cite the experience as one of the reasons why he supported construction of the Interstate Highway System as President of the United States.

The only national roads then in existence were a network of National Auto Trails. This system of highways, begun in 1913, predated the numbered US Highway System instituted in 1926, and the Interstate Highway System initiated in 1956. The auto trails were named highways, rather than numbered. They were built, not by the federal government, or states, but primarily by local governments, auto clubs and highway associations. With names like the Atlantic Coastal Highway, Dixie Highway, Jefferson Davis Highway, Lincoln Highway, and Old Spanish Trail, this system flourished until it was superseded by the numbered US Highway System in 1926.

There had been discussions about constructing an auto trail through the south to honor Confederate General Robert E. Lee, since at least 1911. The idea was conceived by Professor David Carlisle Humphreys, of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA. On February 22, 1919, a group of men met at the Hotel Roanoke in Roanoke, VA to plan a road from Gettysburg, PA to New Orleans, LA to be named after the southern chieftain.⁸ At this meeting a provisional Lee Highway Association was formed.⁹



Lee Highway at Hatmark Branch, looking SW towards the Town of Fairfax, March 9, 1924. Note the creek flowing across Lee Highway. Blake Lane (not visible) is at the top of the hill. Photo courtesy of Lee Hubbard.



Lee Highway at Hatmark Branch, looking SW towards the City of Fairfax, March 2008. The creek now flows *under* Lee Highway! Intersection of Blake Lane is in distance. Photo courtesy of Page Johnson.

Lee Highway was to be only the third such project undertaken in this country. The Lincoln Highway, which ran from New York, NY to San Francisco, CA, was started in 1913, and the Dixie Highway, which ran from Chicago, IL to Miami, FL, was started in 1914. On December 3, 1919, the Lee Highway Association was officially formed. Dr. Samuel M. Johnson was named General Director. Ironically, Dr. Johnson was the son of a Union Army veteran from Indiana. Still, he would devote much of his life to the development of Lee Highway.¹⁰ Dr. Johnson, who had no formal training as an engineer, laid out the Lee Highway route himself. Over the next several years, the route was altered. The final plan bypassed New Orleans altogether, in favor of a more direct route that would link Washington, D.C. with San Diego, CA. Ultimately, Lee Highway would run through 115 counties in eleven states, including the District of Columbia. Nearly half the route went directly through the heart of the old Confederacy. At the eastern and western terminus would be links to New York City and San Francisco, CA.

Citizens and landowners along the proposed Lee Highway route were critical to the early development of the road because there were no federal or state funds available. Dr. Johnson lobbied federal, state and local officials tirelessly for support. He also spoke to countless business, civic, and service associations along the proposed route of the economic benefits of the planned highway. He solicited their support and sought subscriptions for membership in the Lee Highway Association. He also urged them to form local units of the association. While many citizens pledged their support, a somewhat smaller number actually honored their pledges.¹¹ As a result, the association struggled. Yet, as a result of all this activity, land values along Lee Highway rose dramatically as reflected in Fairfax County land records.

On June 28, 1919, the U.S. government permitted the National Highway Marking Association to place a plaster monument to commemorate the start of the Transcontinental Motor Convoy to San Francisco, CA. This marker was paced on the Elipse behind the White House in Washington, DC.

In November 1921, the Virginia State Highway Commission recommended to the legislature that an 18-foot-wide concrete highway be constructed and:

*“...that the route through Virginia, adopted by the Lee Highway Association, from Bristol, via Abingdon, Marion, Wytheville, Pulaski, Dublin, Radford, Lexington, Staunton, Harrisonburg, New Market, Luray, Sperryville, Warrenton, Fairfax, to Key Memorial Bridge be officially known and dedicated by the legislative enactment as Lee Highway, as a fitting and permanent memorial to and tribute of love, admiration and respect for General Robert E. Lee from the people of Virginia.”*¹²

The following March, the Virginia General Assembly added Lee Highway to the state highway system:

*“...for the purpose of establishing a perpetual memorial from the people of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and as part of a national memorial to Robert Edward Lee, the following section of the said system shall be designated and known as ‘Lee Highway’: Key Bridge, Falls Church, Fairfax, Gainesville, Warrenton, Sperryville, Luray, New market, Harrisonburg, Staunton, Lexington, Natural Bridge, Roanoke, Salem, Christiansburg, Radford, Pulaski, Wytheville, Marion, Abingdon, and Bristol,...”*¹³

A new, Zero Milestone marker was erected on the Elipse behind the White House replacing the earlier 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy marker. The new marker and was dedicated by President Warren G. Harding on June 4, 1923. The 4-foot-high pink granite monument was a gift of the Lee Highway Association, and remains the official starting point for measurement of highway distances from Washington, D.C. Dr. Johnson, who spoke at the dedication, remarked:

*“We have taken our stand for a paved United States.”*¹⁴

Lee Highway in Fairfax

Locally, Lee Highway was just the second paved road in all of Fairfax County. The Little River Turnpike was the first. In Fairfax, what was known as Lee Highway is now alternately known as Old Lee Highway (Rt. 237), east of Fairfax. Main Street (Rt. 236) through downtown Fairfax and Kamp Washington to the city limit. What we now call Fairfax Boulevard (Rt. 50 & 29), between Fairfax Circle and Kamp Washington was also called Lee Highway when a 'cut-off', or bypass, around downtown Fairfax was constructed in 1931.

In Fairfax County, a Lee Highway Committee was formed of interested citizens for the purpose of completing the new road through the county. Those from Fairfax included Charles Kaiser, a farmer, Lee Makel, Fairfax S. McCandlish, a lawyer, Robert J. Miller, a dairy farmer, James W. Pobst, a dairy farmer, John W. Rust, a lawyer, Col. Consuelo A. Seoane, U.S. Army Signal Corps, of Washington, DC, but who owned land on Lee Highway in

Merrifield, VA, and Lehman H. Young, automobile garage owner, Fairfax.

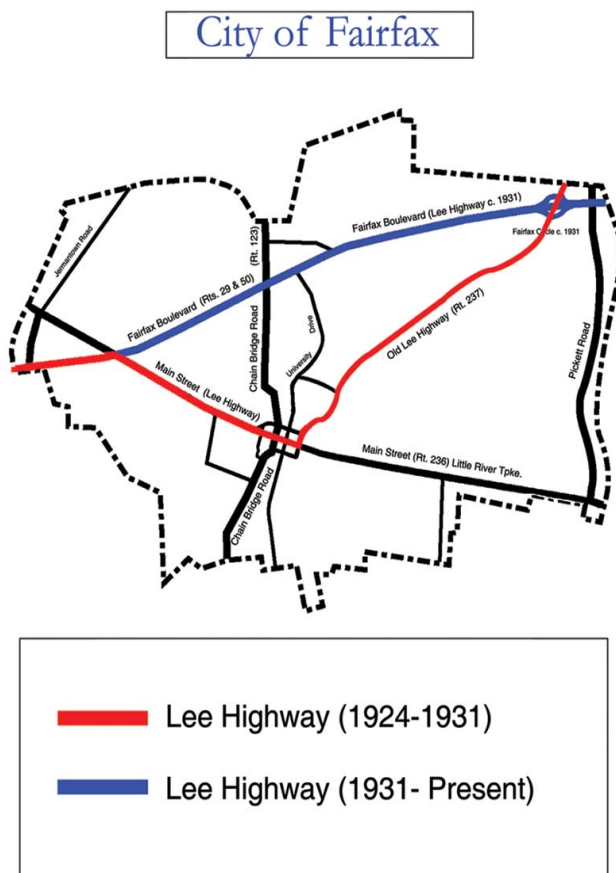
In March 1922, the citizens of Fairfax gathered at the Fairfax County Courthouse to celebrate the adoption of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Highway by the General Assembly.¹⁵ A local Lee Highway Association was formed with Lehman H. Young as president, Fairfax Shield McCandlish, vice president, and Dr. Frank W. Huddleston, treasurer.

*"Every effort will be made to hasten the construction of the roadway in Virginia, and it is stated there are good prospects of its early completion."*¹⁶

In May 1922, the State Highway Commission initially awarded the contract for the construction of Lee Highway from Falls Church to Fairfax to Lewis Morgan Johnston¹⁷, an Alexandria contractor. However, Johnston's bid was later rejected as too high.¹⁸

In the fall of 1922, a group of concerned citizens in the Falls Church and Providence Districts of Fairfax County approached the Fairfax County Circuit Court with a petition to have the funding of the Lee Highway project placed on the November ballot.¹⁹ The road bond in the amount of \$275,000.00 passed overwhelmingly. In accordance with the Robertson Act, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors authorized the transfer of the funds to the State Highway Commission. However, there was some apprehension on the part of the board:

"A committee of Mr. F.S. McCandlish, Col. C.A. Seoane,²⁰ Mr. G.F. Harrison²¹ and Mr. Ronald Blake,²² appeared before the Commission and requested that they be given the assurance that if the \$12,000,000 bond issue was passed by the Legislature, that the Commission would repay the money [\$275,000.00] advanced by Fairfax County to build Lee Highway in a definite period of time. The Commission advised the delegation that they could not anticipate the action of the Legislature and therefore, could give no such assurance, but that it would be the



*policy of the Commission to allocate such sums as they may have available, to such Projects to repay the advance just as though no advancements had been made or the work completed. The Committee was also advised that the Chain Bridge Road would be maintained as a detour until the Lee Highway had been completed.”*²³

Lee Highway was constructed by the State Highway Commission utilizing the State Convict Road Force. Work on the Falls Church to Fairfax section began in August 1923.

*“A large number of mules and road building machinery has been assembled at Old Camp Alger in preparation for starting grading between Fairfax and Falls Church.”*²⁴

During the construction of Lee Highway, the State Convict Road Force were housed in *stick camps* that were

moved as road construction progressed. The Virginia legislature anticipated the need for this and adopted legislation that would allow for the temporary use of private land for this purpose. Landowners were reimbursed a small sum for the use of their land. The convicts were not chained, as they worked during the day as is popularly depicted in the movies. However, they were chained together in their tents at night at the end of day.²⁵

There were at least three different camps along the route of Lee Highway in Fairfax County. The first was located at Camp Alger, the sight of the former Spanish-American War training camp near Falls Church. The second sight was located at Merrifield on Lee Highway at its intersection with Interstate 495. The Virginia Department of Transportation still maintains a small facility here. A third camp was located west of Fairfax near Shirley Gate Road on the north side of Lee Highway. This location was later used as a temporary prison camp for German prisoners of war during World War II.²⁶ Additionally, this location became the first site of the semi-permanent State Prison Camp No. 30, or simply *Camp 30*. A camp for free laborers was located near the Hatmark School which stood on Lee Highway at



State Convict Road Force (a.k.a. *Chain Gang*) on a lunch break. Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA c. 1924.

Photo courtesy: Bill Johnston

the top of the hill just east of the City of Fairfax line.

It is somewhat shocking today to think that Lee Highway was constructed through the use of mules, surplus military equipment and convict labor supervised by shotgun-toting guards. But, that is exactly how it was done.

In the spring of 1924 State Highway Commission announced plans to abandon the original route into Fairfax:

"It was brought to the attention of the Board that the State Road Commission proposed to abandon the route by Campbell's corner into Fairfax, for the Lee Highway, and to substitute a route leaving the present road at a point northeast of Fairfax and coming out on Little River pike in front of the Fairfax school house." ²⁷

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, under pressure from local residents, objected and drafted a resolution which was sent to the commission reminding them of the terms of November 1922 bond referendum:

"...the bonds for the building of the road were issued by Providence district and by court order for a route from 'Campbell's corner, in the Town of

Fairfax, to Brown's store, in Falls Church." ²⁸

In March 1922, Mr. Henry G. Shirley,²⁹ State Highway Commissioner, met with the Fairfax County Supervisors Ballenger, Reid, Stewart and Buckley and Commonwealth's Attorney Wilson M. Farr regarding the route of Lee Highway into Fairfax. Shirley agreed to leave it up to the Supervisors to decide on one of three routes:

"One coming into Fairfax at the east end of the town, near the Fairfax school; another following the old road and coming out at Campbell's corner, and the third leaving the present road at the north end of the Willard place and coming in a curve about a hundred yards to the west of the Willard barn and by way of Mechanic street [University Drive] to the Little River pike [Main Street] at the Herald office corner." ³⁰

The Supervisors decided on the route by Campbell's corner, Main Street and Old Lee Highway.

As the construction of Lee Highway approached the Town of Fairfax, the new road created a lot of attention. Its progress was recorded in every weekly edition of the *Fairfax Herald*:



Gillespie's Texaco. Cor. of Lee Highway and Main Street, Fairfax, VA. The first service station in Fairfax. Constructed 1925. Photo courtesy of Lee Hubbard.



Starbucks Coffee. Cor. of (Old) Lee Highway & Main Street, Fairfax, VA. The first Starbucks in Fairfax. Constructed 2001. Stands near the site of Gillespie's Texaco. Photo courtesy of Page Johnson.

"The widening of the highway at Campbell's corner, where it will turn upon the Little River Pike, is about completed, and the grading force is now working in the vicinity of Mr. Harry Wilcoxon's farm. At Campbell's corner the roadway on one side was cut down about five feet and widened to 53 feet. The excavated material was dumped into the old railroad cut, south of the home of Mr. James U. Kincheloe, and on the street between the home of Mr. J.W. Birkett and the Willard property. In widening the roadway a number of maple trees, on the Kincheloe place, had to be removed. Dynamite was used to blow the roots out of the ground." ^{31, 32, 33}

The grading was completed by June 1924. The construction of the road surface began June 18th and was completed by November 11, 1924. Grading and construction of Lee Highway continued on towards Centreville and beyond. The official opening of the Georgetown to Fairfax section of Lee Highway occurred on December 2, 1924. A midday luncheon and an oyster supper were held on December 2nd at the Hatmark School located just east of Fairfax Circle. A larger celebration occurred at the Falls Church on December 13th. ^{34, 35}

The completion of Lee Highway was a boon to the local economy. Merton E. Church, a real estate agent from Falls Church, VA wrote to the *Washington Post*:

"As to the material benefits of this splendid road; every foot of real estate bordering thereon between Washington and Fairfax has increased from 500 to 1,000 percent in value. Hundred of residences and business buildings have been erected along and adjacent to the highway that would never have been built if the road had not been constructed." ³⁶

One of the first businesses in Fairfax to open on the newly completed Lee Highway was Gillespie's Texaco,

which stood on the NE corner of Lee Highway and Main Street.³⁷ Gillespie's is believed to have been the first service station in Fairfax.

"Leveling the ground at the northeast intersection of the Lee Highway with Main street, for the purpose of putting up a modern filling station, is being pushed and several teams and a score of men are employed on the work. The excavated material is being taken to the old railroad cut, near the home of Mr. James U. Kincheloe, and is being there dumped. The house, now the property of Mr. Wilson M. Farr, is being moved back some distance to make room for the filling station which will be operated by Mr. B.S. Gillespie, and which, it is expected, will be ready for service by the time warm weather comes." ^{38, 39}

The men who actually built the road in Fairfax County were not forgotten, at least by one appreciative citizen. James W. Pobst, a Fairfax dairy farmer who resided on Lee Highway south of what is now Fairfax Circle, wrote to the *Fairfax Herald* in November 1924:

"The grading was supervised by Foreman T.P. Johnson and W.P. Pitts, with M.M. Mays as Foreman of clearing right of way, etc. The grading was one of the big problems, but with 15 to 35 mules and 30 to 50 men in addition to a steam shovel manned by Mr. J.E. Fink, who could operate it as though it was a human being, the hills disappeared before the forces of Johnson and Pitts as so much grass before a sickle."

I want to especially mention the truck drivers that so materially aided the construction of the road under the supervision of Foreman J.M. Harrison. Besides moving the material for the road they unloaded 275 cars of cement which in itself was a big job to say nothing of the other truck loads of material needed for the work."

The quarry was in charge of Foreman C.C. Pruett, with a force of about 30 prisoners, and they moved and crushed about 850 cars of stone.

The building of 6 wide bridges was supervised by Foreman Whitten with a force of 15 to 20 prisoners.

Mr. W.S. Covington was in charge of the sub-grading and placing the forms ahead of the paving machine, with Mr. Wm. Hurley as Foreman in charge of the laying of the concrete.

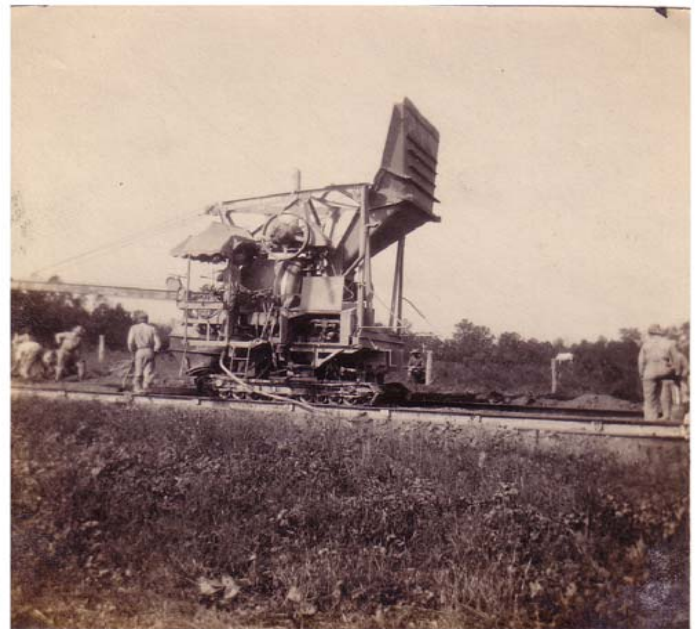
The modern and well kept prison camp at Merrifield was in charge of Capt. G.F. Bing, who cared for health, food and clothing of prisoners.

All these gentlemen are experts in the line of work that they had supervision over [and] are due a great deal more credit than I am able to give in these few lines for the splendid stretch of road that they have finished in so short a time and I believe at a great saving of cost to the State over and above putting the work out at contract.”⁴⁰

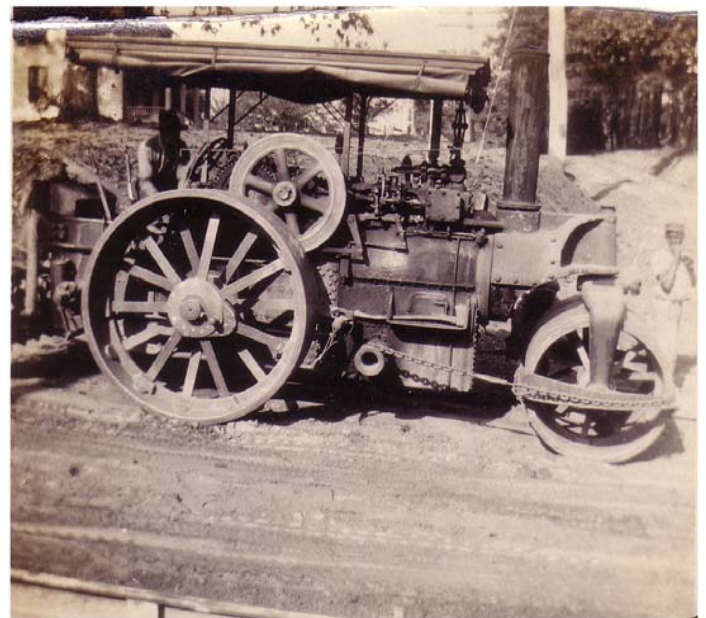
Lee Highway was part of the National Auto Trails system which predated the US highway numbering system. A unique feature of the auto trails were colorful and distinctive signs which marked each route. There were at least two different designs for signs to mark the route of Lee Highway. In July 1921, the Lee Highway Association announced:

“The design adopted is enameled in red, white and blue with the legend, ‘Lee Highway,’ in a curved diagonal across the center strip of white, with black letters. The marker is shaped to attach to telephone poles.”⁴¹

This effort appeared to have failed due to lack of proper funding.



A Koehring Paver in operation on Lee Highway in Fairfax near Blake Lane, in the summer of 1924. This machine, built by the Koehring Machine Co. of Milwaukee, WI, was steam powered.
Photo courtesy Lee Hubbard.



A Buffalo-Springfield Steam Roller on Lee Highway at Blake Lane. The home of Frank & Wena Gibson is just visible in the upper left background. Summer of 1924.
Photo courtesy Lee Hubbard.

In February 1923, the design of the sign had changed slightly. The Lee Highway Association announced:

*“The marking design is in the form of a shield on which the name of Lee is displayed, the shield being that of the coat of arms of the Lee family. The colors are blue and gray. Arrangements have been contemplated also, for the placing of permanent markers; these being reinforced concrete, the posts being nine feet in length, over six feet above the ground. The marker on the post is the same design as the pole marking. It is of concrete, the colors being fast colors produced by mixing of pigment with marble dust. These markers will be placed along the section of the highway through this county.”*⁴²



Rendering of the sign adopted by the Lee Highway Association in 1923 to mark the route of the Lee Highway. Sign was to have been nailed to telephone poles. A similar design appears in the Rand McNally Official 1925 Auto Trails Map: Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia; Rand McNally Co., Chicago, IL.

Courtesy Page Johnson

This second design, apparently, went into production as it appears on the Rand McNally Auto Trails Map of 1925.

⁴³ However, in 1926, with the creation of the new US Highway System, the original Lee Highway signs vanished. No original Lee Highway signs could be located for this article.

Almost as soon as it was completed, a call went out for Lee Highway to be widened. The road was widened to 27 feet in the late 1920s. In addition, a new crossing over the Potomac, the Memorial Bridge, replaced the original route, by way of the Key Bridge at Georgetown. In Virginia, Lee Highway is 412 miles long and runs from the Memorial Bridge in Arlington to State Street in Bristol, VA. Nationally, it is 3,700 miles long from Washington, DC to San Diego, CA.

Gradually, the old named auto trail routes were superseded and largely forgotten. Today, Lee Highway is now called by that name in only two states, Virginia and Alabama, but much of the original route still exists. From the Zero Milestone on the Elipse behind the White House, it traverses the Memorial Bridge into Arlington. It runs through Fairfax and out into the Shenandoah Valley; following US 11 in Virginia and into Tennessee; US 72 in Alabama and Mississippi; US 70 through Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona; and US 80 in Arizona and California, where it ends in San Diego at the Pacific Milestone.

Tom Page Johnson

Economic prosperity goes hand-in-hand with population growth. My grandfather, Thomas Nelson Page Johnson, moved to Fairfax County from Amelia County, VA in 1921 because this was where the jobs were. “Tom Page” a.k.a. “T.P.” moved here to work on the Lee Highway project and probably to escape life as a rural route mail carrier and the family tobacco farm. He was hired by the State Highway Commission as a foreman of one of the two grading crews. In this capacity, he supervised convict laborers, using mules, primitive graders, and surplus military vehicles to level and fill the old roadway leading from Falls Church to Fairfax and beyond. It was hard, dangerous work. Dangerous in the physical sense, but also because the men he supervised were convicted felons. Several of these men escaped in spite of the fact that my grandfather always carried a shotgun while working.⁴⁴



My grandfather, "Tom Page" Johnson, and father, "Billy Page" on a visit back to *Cherry Hill*, Amelia Co., VA, c. 1943

Photo courtesy: Bill Johnston

He boarded in the home of fellow state highway employee, Wallace S. Covington, who lived on Lee Highway near present-day Pan Am Shopping Center. The area was then called Hatmark, after the creek, or branch, that flows nearby. While living here, he met my grandmother, Edna V. Sisson, who was 25 years younger than he. They were married in 1937.

I never knew my grandfather, as he died in 1945, years before I was born. I have often looked at old photos of him and contemplated his life. In researching this story I have gained some insight into his life as well as my grandfather's Lee Highway.

(Endnotes)

¹ *A History of Roads in Virginia*, p. 23, © 2006, Virginia Department of Transportation, Office of Public Affairs, 1401 E. Broad Street, Richmond, VA.

² Acts of Assembly, Chapter 58, p. 50. Acts of the Virginia General Assembly 1906.

³ *A History of Roads in Virginia*, p. 19, © 2006, Virginia Department of Transportation, Richmond, VA.

⁴ *A History of Roads in Virginia*, p. 23, © 2006, Virginia Department of Transportation, Richmond, VA.

⁵ *A History of Roads in Virginia*, p. 27, © 2006, Virginia Department of Transportation, Richmond, VA.

⁶ Acts of Assembly, Chapter 184, p. 268 [SB 227]. Acts of the Virginia General Assembly 1920.

⁷ Weingroff, Richard F., *Dr. S.M. Johnson, A "Dreamer of Dreams"*; US Dept. of Trans., Federal Highway Administration www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/johnson.htm

⁸ The men who attended the first Lee Highway Association meeting were David C. Humphreys, Dean of the Applied Science School, Washington & Lee University; the Hon. E. Lee Trinkle, Virginia State Senator (and future Virginia Governor) from Wytheville, VA; Benjamin C. Moomaw, founder of the City of Buena Vista, VA; John Wood, Secretary, Roanoke Chamber of Commerce, Roanoke, VA; J.A. Mundy, Natural Bridge, VA; James S. Callison, Staunton, VA; Joseph A. Turner, Business Manager, Hollins Institute (now Hollins College), Salem, VA; Madison C. Thomas, Manager, Crockett Springs Hotel (now the site of Camp Alta Mons, Methodist Church), Shawsville, VA; David P. Sites, Stationary Store Merchant, Roanoke, VA.

⁹ *Washington Post*, April 25, 1931, p. LM5.

¹⁰ Weingroff, Richard F., *Dr. S. M. Johnson A "Dreamer of Dreams"*; US Dept. of Trans., Federal Highway Administration. www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/johnson.htm

¹¹ *Fairfax Herald*, October 21, 1921, p. 3.

¹² Minutes of the Commonwealth Transportation Board, November 29, 1921.

¹³ Acts of Assembly, Chapter 316, p. 538 [SB 55]. Acts of the Virginia General Assembly 1922.

¹⁴ Weingroff, Richard F., *Zero Milestone, Washington, D.C.*; US Dept of Trans., Federal Highway Administration www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/zero.htm

¹⁵ Acts of Assembly, Chapter 316, p. 538 [SB 55]. Acts of the Virginia General Assembly 1922.

¹⁶ *Fairfax Herald*, March 24, 1922, p. 5.

¹⁷ Lewis Morgan Johnston (1878– 1937) Constructed at least 80 "hollow-tile" homes in the Rosemont neighborhood of Alexandria, VA between 1918 & 1925. Now the Rosemont Historic District in City of Alexandria; Board Member, Union Finance Company, 1924; Board Member, Arlington Trust Co., 1926; V.P. Virginia Ice & Fuel Corp., 1926; Colonial Mortgage & Investment Corp., 1927. Buried Columbia Gardens.

¹⁸ *Washington Post*, July 24, 1923, 13.

¹⁹ *Fairfax Herald*, September 22, 1922, p. 5.

²⁰ Colonel Consuelo "Con" Andrew Seoane (1876– 1964) son of John F. Seoane, a native of Spain, & Cornelia E. Seoane, a native of Germany. Spanish-American War veteran and career officer in the United States Army. Around 1911, Col. Seoane, with Commander Joseph C. "Snake" Thompson, USN, spent nearly two years as an American spy inside the Japanese Empire, charting possible invasion routes and counting all the Japanese fortifications and naval guns. It was an official, but top-secret joint Army-Navy spy expedition, with Con representing the

Army, and Snake, the Navy. They pretended to be South African naturalists studying Japanese reptiles and amphibians. Res. on Lee Highway at Merrifield, VA. Buried Arl. Natl. Cem.

²¹ George F. Harrison (1851–1938) Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Providence District (1871–1881) and Dranesville District (1915–1928).

²² Ronald Blake (1883–1970) Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Providence District (1916–1924).

²³ Minutes of Meeting of the State Highway and Transportation Commission, October 16, 1922, p. 33 & 34

²⁴ *Fairfax Herald*, August 10, 1923, p. 3.

²⁵ *Washington Post*, June 21, 1972, p. C1.

²⁶ *Washington Post*, May 27, 1945, p. M4.

²⁷ *Fairfax Herald*, March 7, 1924, p. 3.

²⁸ *Fairfax Herald*, March 7, 1924, p. 3.

²⁹ Henry G. Shirley (1874–1941) Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Highways. Born in Locust Grove, WV. He graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1896 with a civil engineering degree and later earned a doctorate, doctor of science degree from the University of Maryland. After serving in the Spanish-American War, he worked for the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad and other railroad companies and for the engineering department of the District of Columbia. He was roads engineer for Baltimore County, Maryland, and chief engineer of the Maryland State Roads Commission. During World War I, he served on the Highway Transport Committee, Council of National Defense, helping keep the roads of the nation in shape to handle military traffic. In 1918, he became executive secretary of the Federal Highway Council. In 1922, Shirley was appointed as State Highway Commissioner by Virginia Governor E. Lee Trinkle. He continued to serve under Governors Harry F. Byrd, John Garland Pollard, George C. Peery and James H. Price, until his death. The Department of Highways was created as a state agency in 1927. He was the first president of the American Association of State Highway Officials. He approved and promoted plans for the first limited access highway in Virginia, extending from Route 1 in Northern Virginia to the 14th Street Bridge in Washington, D.C. Construction on the highway began shortly after his death. This road was named as the Henry G. Shirley Memorial Highway in his honor, and now is part of I-95 and I-395.

³⁰ *Fairfax Herald*, April 11, 1924, p. 3.

³¹ *Fairfax Herald*, August 8, 1924, p. 3.

³² "Harry Wilcoxon's farm" is now known as the Blenheim Estate, and owned and maintained by the City of Fairfax as an historic site.

³³ James U. Kincheloe (1879–1947) Commissioner of the Revenue, Fairfax County, VA.

³⁴ *Fairfax Herald*, November 28, 1924, p. 3.

³⁵ *Fairfax Herald*, November 14, 1924, p. 3.

³⁶ *Washington Post*, April 25, 1931, p. LM5.

³⁷ Deed of Lease, The Texas Company to B.S. Gillespie, Fairfax County Deed Book P-9, Pg. 17.

³⁸ *Fairfax Herald*, February 6, 1925, p. 3.

³⁹ Berkley Shelburn Gillespie (1890–????) Res. Cedar Avenue, Fairfax, VA. Occ. Fairfax County Engineer. Co-owner of Gillespie & Pardoe Construction Co. who completed the paving of Little River Turnpike in Fairfax c. 1923.

⁴⁰ *Fairfax Herald*, November 28, 1924, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Fairfax Herald*, July 22, 1921, p. 5.

⁴² *Fairfax Herald*, February 2, 1923, p. 5.

⁴³ Rand McNally Official 1925 Auto Trails Map: Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia; Rand McNally Co., Chicago, IL. Original located in The Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

⁴⁴ *Fairfax Herald*, August 28, 1924, p. 3.

Video Oral History Project

Historic Fairfax City, Inc. is proud to announce a new video oral history project.

People are the greatest asset of any community. The City of Fairfax is no exception. As the county seat of the wealthiest of all of Virginia's 100 counties, Fairfax has enjoyed a unique place in the heritage of Northern Virginia. Our community is also blessed with individuals who, through the simple act of living day to day, have been participants and witness to some of these historical events.

HFCI, working with the City of Fairfax Cable Television staff, seeks to professionally film the stories of older Fairfax residents to foster an understanding of the how decisions and actions of the past and present produce lasting changes to our way of life. To date, we have videotaped the stories of several residents. Edited video footage will be available soon on the *City Screen* - Channel 12, the cable channel of the City of Fairfax and for future distribution.

Through the stories of area residents, we hope to provide viewers and future generations of viewers a more personal connection and stewardship to the rich heritage of Northern Virginia.

A greater sense of stewardship is a natural outgrowth of greater understanding.

Plan a Lee Highway Now.

A project which is being considered in the South and which is receiving considerable publicity is the Lee Highway, which it is proposed will run parallel to the Lincoln Highway, although south of the old Mason and Dixon line bisecting the two Virginias.

New York Times, December 6, 1914, p. X9.

Second Sunday Programs

at the

Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center

10209 Main Street, Fairfax, VA

Note: Unless noted, all programs begin at 2 p.m. at Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, 10209 Main Street, Fairfax. Programs are free and include light refreshments. Call: 703-385-8414.

April 13th – 2 p.m. – Lecture and book signing by Dr. Zachary M. Schrag, Professor, George Mason University, and author of *The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro*. Program will be held in the second floor Hamill Gallery at Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, 10029 Main Street.

May 11 - “Restored Gardens of Northern Virginia,” a talk by Betsy Huffman of the Garden Club of Virginia, and tour of the Pozer Garden. (Please note: this event will be held at Old Town Hall, 3999 University Drive.)

June 8 - “Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic,” a talk and book signing by George Mason University Professor Rosemarie Zagarri.

July 13 - “Prelude to the Battle of First Manassas,” a talk by Mark Trbovich, a Civil War historian and researcher.

The City of Fairfax is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination in all City programs, services, and activities and will provide reasonable accommodations upon request. To request special accommodations, call Susan Gray at (703) 385 – 8415. Please allow seven working days in advance in order to make necessary arrangements.

City Walking Tours Resume

The second year of the Walking Tours of Historic Downtown Fairfax will begin April 26th. The tours were started last year by Historic Fairfax City, Inc. Well over 500 people, from all over, came and enjoyed seeing and learning about the rich history within downtown Fairfax City.

The walking tour is held every Saturday night (weather permitting) lead by a member of HFCI. The tour, which is approximately 2 hours long, looks at 6 historic sites in the 4 block area of “Old Town Fairfax”. One of the sites is open for public view each week and is featured with its own unique story.

Enjoy an early dinner at one of the many wonderful restaurants in historic downtown Fairfax and join us for the the tour afterward. Or take the tour first and reflect on history afterward over a glass of something cool.

Either way you should make reservations as space is limited. Reservations can be made at the Museum and Visitors Center by calling (703) 385-8414. The cost is \$5.00 per person, children under 8 years old are free. All proceeds go to HFCI for the benefit of supporting the historic sites within the City of Fairfax.

Tours begin at 7:00 pm at “The Moore House” (Sweet Life Café) 3950 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax, VA. A preview is given of the tour before the walking begins. For more information call Hildie Carney, Walking Tour Chair at (703) 591-5305.

Welcome New Members!

Claire & S. Woodruff Bentley
Gary & Jenne Lindner

The Board of Directors of HFCI extends a hearty welcome to all new HFCI members.



HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC.

Do you want to know more about the history of where you live?

JOIN HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC.

Just what is available to you as a member of HFCI?

A newsletter, 4 times a year announcing what is happening with all HFCI projects and events

2 general meetings a year, affording you an opportunity to meet and speak with people behind the scenes working to maintain interest in the history of Fairfax.

We are looking forward to having you join us. We need and value your support. Together we will preserve the heritage that has been left to us.

The Board of Directors of
Historic Fairfax City, Inc.

HFCI MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/ RENEWAL

HISTORIC FAIRFAX CITY, INC. is a non-profit corporation (501©(3) organization)

Membership Classifications:

- Class A Individual\$25.00
- Class A-1 Additional Household Member\$10.00
- Class B-1 Non-profit Organizations\$35.00
- Class B-2 For profit Organizations\$50.00

Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership application and check made out to Historic Fairfax City Inc. for:
\$ _____

Name or Organization: _____

Telephone #: _____

Contact name: _____

e-mail: _____

Address: _____

Return to: Historic Fairfax City, Inc.,
Attention: Membership Committee
10209 Main Street
Fairfax, VA 22030

-or-

Website: www.historicfairfax.org
E-mail: info@historcfairfax.org

"Preserving the Past. Protecting the Future."

Return Address - Historic Fairfax City, Inc.
David L. Pumphrey, President
10209 Main Street
Fairfax, VA 22030



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E-mail: historicfairfax@aol.com

Website: www.historicfairfax.org