

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 27, 2016

Major Highway Routes through Our Area: The *Weekly News* of April 30, 2007, explained how the numbering of U.S. highways took place in the late 1920s. Especially local to us were U.S. Route 1 that passed through Kennett Square en route from Maine to Florida and U.S. Routes 30 and 40 that went west from Atlantic City.

U.S. Route 1 (this had nothing to do with the present Delaware Route 1), from Port Kent, Maine, to Key West, Florida, passed through all the major cities en route, such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. As originally laid out, it went near the center of each city. Following the Boston Post Road from New Haven into New York City, it crossed Manhattan to the new Holland Tunnel under the Hudson, and then across the Jersey marshes to Newark. In Philadelphia it followed the road closest to the Delaware River, then past City Hall and west toward Baltimore Pike. As traffic increased, many of these old routes with increasing stop lights became slow and tedious ways to travel, so faster routes were sought around the center of big cities.

In 1930, our favorite route south was to go to Elkton and pick up the new U.S. Route 40 (now Maryland Route 7), which had crossed the Pennsville-New Castle Ferry en route from Atlantic City. Southwest of Elkton it passed through the center of North East, Charlestown, and Principia Furnace before reaching the Susquehanna at Perryville. Here the river was crossed on the old railroad bridge with a single lane in each direction, one above the other. What fun! Route 40 then passed through Havre de Grace and Aberdeen en route to downtown Baltimore.

In the early 1930s, however, travel patterns changed with the improvement of U.S. Route 1 through our area. Far enough west to be in the Piedmont, Route 1 was very hilly from Media to the Susquehanna River, but it became the favored route when going south. Bypassing downtown Philadelphia, it used the new Roosevelt Boulevard and City Line Avenue to shorten the time, and the completion of the Conowingo Dam with Route 1 on top made it a desirable route to Baltimore and on south. It entered Baltimore on Bel Air Road, then North Avenue, and south to the large Montgomery Ward store enroute to Elk Ridge, Laurel, College Park, Hyattsville, and down Rhode Island Avenue into the Nation's Capital. Route 1 skirted the White House and the Washington Monument before crossing the 14th Street Bridge toward Alexandria. A lot to see for an eight-year-old riding in his father's big Packard.

About 1937, it was decided to improve Route 1 southwest of Philadelphia. Pennsylvania, was big on three-lane roads, with a 12-foot-wide concrete strip in each direction and a black-topped section of equal width in the middle. The idea was that cars wanting to pass slower vehicles could use the center lane, and traffic would be light enough so this would not happen in opposite directions at the same time. From Media at least to Jennersville, Route 1 was improved this way, and between Avondale and West Grove, it was relocated altogether. State Street in Kennett Square became one-way west (south), and Cypress Street was improved to handle the eastbound (north) traffic. Three-lane roads were prevalent in Pennsylvania for 25 years.

In 1939 or 1940, however, a major highway project improved Route 40 from State Road, Delaware, to Baltimore, when it was made a dual highway paralleling the old, with two lanes in each direction. A new Susquehanna River Bridge was built between Perryville and Havre de Grace. With this improvement, our traffic patterns were changed again as we would go to Newark and Elkton to pick up the new road.

In an attempt to speed up local traffic, the 4-lane limited-access Route 1 bypass was constructed from east of Kennett Square to the Maryland line in the early 1960s. Kennett Square, Toughkenamon, Avondale, West Grove, and Oxford were bypassed, and with light traffic, it was a great road to travel. The Interstate Highway System reached our area in November 1963, when President Kennedy presided over the opening of the Maryland and Delaware Turnpikes, a portion of Interstate 95. North-South travel became a decidedly different experience.