

# The Kennesaw House

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From the Antebellum days to the early 20th century, the Kennesaw House had a reputation as a pleasant hotel located in a moderate climate for both northern and southern visitors. During the Civil War, the Kennesaw House gained local notoriety for being the starting point of the Great Locomotive Chase and for serving as General William T. Sherman's headquarters during his Atlanta Campaign. The Georgia Historical Commission erected a marker dedicated to these historically significant events and the building in 1956.

Located on the historic Marietta Square in Marietta, Georgia, the Kennesaw House is a local landmark that has seen Marietta grow from a small rural town to a large industrial city in the Atlanta suburbs. Built in 1845, the Kennesaw House was originally used as a cotton warehouse under the ownership of John Glover.<sup>i</sup> This cotton warehouse was conveniently located next to the railroad tracks that serviced the Western and Atlantic Railroad, which shipped cotton to major industrial cities such as Atlanta, Chattanooga, and Charleston. Ten years later, on May 1, 1855, Dix Fletcher purchased the cotton warehouse from John Glover for \$12,000 and transformed it into a hotel.<sup>ii</sup> A Massachusetts native, Fletcher was a "staunch Unionist" and his son-in-law, Henry Cole, was "an active and intrepid Yankee spy."<sup>iii</sup> Once Dix Fletcher had purchased the building from John Glover, Fletcher named his hotel the Fletcher House until 1867 when he renamed it the Kennesaw House.<sup>iv</sup>

It was not until the Civil War that the Kennesaw House gained notoriety and expanded its fame beyond being a local hotel. On April 11, 1862, James Andrews and eighteen US soldiers spent the night at the Kennesaw House.<sup>v</sup> The next morning James Andrews and the “Raiders” left the Kennesaw House, boarded a train to the neighboring city of Kennesaw, and stole *The General* when its Confederate crew stopped for breakfast.<sup>vi</sup> The purpose of this raid was to help cut the Confederacy into smaller pieces by stealing a Confederate locomotive while destroying bridges and supply lines along the way.<sup>vii</sup> If the raid had been successful, it could have caused a serious problem for the Confederacy in terms of shipping men and supplies to other Confederate states. Although Andrews and his Raiders were ultimately unsuccessful, the Kennesaw House can claim itself as the starting point for what later became known as the “Great Locomotive Chase,” which is also the title of a Disney-inspired movie based on the same events.<sup>viii</sup>

In 1864, as Sherman’s troops closed in on Atlanta, the Kennesaw House came under control of the US Army, and it was about to receive another guest that would add to its already growing local notoriety. On July 3, 1864, General William T. Sherman established his headquarters in the Kennesaw House for the duration of his Atlanta Campaign.<sup>ix</sup> Several months later on November 14, departing US cavalrymen began to burn down anything and everything that could be of use to the Confederates as Sherman began his March to the Sea.<sup>x</sup> Although Sherman’s flames scorched the city of Marietta, local legend states the Kennesaw House was allegedly spared because Fletcher, like Sherman, was a Mason.<sup>xi</sup> Being a Unionist and having a US spy for a son-in-law also likely influenced Sherman’s decision to keep the Kennesaw House from burning to the ground. Unintentionally however, the roof of the Kennesaw House caught fire as ash and ember from nearby burning buildings landed on the roof.<sup>xii</sup> The fourth floor was never rebuilt.

During the early years of Reconstruction, the newly renamed Kennesaw House re-emerged as a “first class hotel” where travelers could find elegant furniture, comfort, and “a hearty meal.”<sup>xiii</sup> Dix Fletcher aimed to restore the Kennesaw House’s reputation “as a resort destination free from the ice and chill wind of the North and the oppressive heat and relentless bugs of the South.”<sup>xiv</sup> An advertisement for the hotel from 1875 describes the city of Marietta as, “famous for its refined society, pure water, salubrious climate and bracing atmosphere.”<sup>xv</sup> One writer from the *Atlanta Herald* stopped by the Kennesaw House and described an elegant tea party with lively music that occurred “until the wee small hours” within the “charming parlors of the Kennesaw House.”<sup>xvi</sup>

The Kennesaw House had continued success as a hotel throughout the late 19th century and into the 20th century, until it began to undergo numerous renovations, restorations, and changes in ownership.<sup>xvii</sup> In 1920, the *Marietta Journal* explained that the Kennesaw House was closing down the dining room and that only the upper floors would have rooms available to guests. This decision by the Kennesaw House management “further emphasizes the need of a modern hotel in Marietta.”<sup>xviii</sup> Despite its wane as a popular hotel in the early-to-mid-20th century, the Kennesaw House remained an active hotel until at least 1973.<sup>xix</sup> The Kennesaw House is now owned by the Downtown Marietta Development Authority, and since 1996 the building has functioned as the Marietta Museum of History.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> “Kennesaw House,” Marietta Museum of History, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://www.mariettahistory.org/galleries/kennesaw-house>.
- <sup>ii</sup> John Glover to Dix Fletcher, *Transfer of Title*, Marietta, Georgia, May 1, 1855.
- <sup>iii</sup> Russell S. Bonds, *Stealing the General: The Great Locomotive Chase and the First Medal of Honor*, (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2008), 83.
- <sup>iv</sup> “Kennesaw House,” Marietta Museum.
- <sup>v</sup> Bonds, *Stealing the General*, 83.
- <sup>vi</sup> Bill Kinney, “Loco Chase Nearly Nipped,” *Marietta Daily Journal*, March 21, 1993.
- <sup>vii</sup> Bill Kinney, “Chase on Up to Kennesaw,” *Marietta Daily Journal*, October 4, 1992.
- <sup>viii</sup> B.C. Yates, “City Dons Decorations for Disney Premier,” June 1956.
- <sup>ix</sup> Bonds, *Stealing the General*, 329.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xi</sup> “Kennesaw House,” Marietta Museum.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xiii</sup> Fletcher and Freyer, “Kennesaw House,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 19, 1868.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Bonds, *Stealing the General*, 82.
- <sup>xv</sup> J.Q.A. Lewis, “Kennesaw House: Summer and Winter Resort,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1875.

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<sup>xvi</sup> “Marietta,” *Marietta Journal*, January 24, 1873.

<sup>xvii</sup> Kinney, “Loco Chase Nearly Nipped.”

<sup>xviii</sup> “Marietta’s Hotel Service Still Further Reduced,” *Marietta Journal*, April 30, 1920.

<sup>xix</sup> Jean Beard to Frank McNeel, “Business License,” *City of Marietta Business License Bureau*, January 9, 1973.

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