

TRANSPORTATION

(Ralph L. Sheridan)

At the time the earliest colonists settled this territory, they had to adopt the modes of travel and ways of getting from place to place of their predecessors and new neighbors, the Indians. These were first --- and generally --- to walk on their own stout legs; second to go wherever they could by water, in boats. The Indians had dim narrow moccasin paths in many places through the woods. These were quite often the trails of wild animals. Narrow streams could be crossed on natural ford-ways or on rude bridges of fallen trees. But, these Indian trails or animal paths would not long suffice for the practical needs of the people. Bridle paths were cut through the forest from one homestead to another, and connecting them all, more or less, by one "great road," directly with the meeting house and the grist mills. Hay had to be drawn from the meadows, and for this a road must be made. Paths had to be opened to outlying lands.

After the period of walking, nearly all land travel for a century was on horseback. Women and children usually rode on a pillion behind a man. (A "pillion" was a padded cushion with straps which sometimes had on one side a sort of plat-form stirrup.) (The "horse-block", a large stone was used that the women might safely alight.) One way of progress which would help four persons ride part of their journey was what was called the "ride-and-tie" system. Two of the four persons who were travelling started on their road on foot, two mounted on the saddle and pillion, rode about a mile, dismounted, tied the horse and walked on. When the two who had started

on foot reached the waiting horse, they mounted, rode on past the other couple for a mile or so, dismounted, tied the horse and walked on.

The inland transportation of freight was carried on by pack-horses. Long distant grists were brought to the mill in rude two-wheeled carts or on horseback. Later, ox-teams were used for heavy trucking and carting. The oxen were also used for plowing and rough hard work. Wood, heavy goods and lumber was often transported by floating rafts on the rivers. The settlers commonly rode horseback, and later maybe the very fashionable had a chaise, but wagons had not appeared and the roads were not good enough for them. New roads were made by "all able-bodied males between sixteen and sixty years", who were required to give one(or more)day's labor on the town way, and another day's work, or more, toward a "King's Highway", or Great Road. Penalty for non-compliance was usually set at five shillings per day,--an enormous sum in those times.

Just prior to the Revolutionary War, the means of transportation between towns and cities was by stage wagon. In 1783, the stage wagon operating on the Turnpikes was a rectangular box, mounted on springs, containing four seats to accommodate eleven passengers and the driver. It had a top with side curtains. There were no backs to the seats. There was no side entrance. One had to climb over the passengers in front. As time went on, they became known as stage-coaches. In 1827, the Traveller's Register reported eight hundred stage-coaches arriving and leaving Boston each week.

One of the interesting and outstanding features of most old New England towns is the provision made for the entertainment of visitors and guests. It is stated that one could find a tavern or inn

*The first highway work was done
in the principal streets of the town,
and the first one of the new
highway was built.*

at a distance of not over one mile. These taverns were reached by stage-coach and could accommodate the stage-coach driver, as well as a change of horses. Every Inn had a name, usually painted on its swinging sign-board. The names were simply a repetition of old English tavern signs, until the Revolutionary days, when patriotic landlords eagerly invented and adopted new names and signs. The scarlet coat of King George became the blue and buff of George Washington; the eagle of the United States took the place of the British lion.

A line of stage-coaches from Boston to Lancaster made regular stops at the Rice Tavern, located at the junction of "New Lancaster Road" (now known as Puffer Road) and Old Marlboro and Concord Great Road. (This property was purchased from Benjamin Crane of Stow in 1685 and was used as a tavern until 1815. For many years it was used as a farmhouse by Jonathan Vose and his brother.) (The house was torn down by the United States Government during World War II, as it came within the boundary of the ammunition depot. The foundation is still there.)

When the "Ben Smith" bridge was built in 1816, Great Road was opened to traffic and two stage-coaches going each way passed over the road daily. About 1816, Levi Smith ran a tavern at what was later known as the Aaron Thompson or William Eveleth house on Great Road (now occupied by the Robert Mayes family). This was one of several along the "Great Road" for the accommodation of travellers between Boston and Fitchburg, and where the stage-coaches made regular stops. Another stage-coach made regular trips from Lowell to Framingham, passing through this territory.

Communications with Boston and larger places was slow and difficult. Merchandise had to be hauled by means of ox or horse teams.

All internal commerce between city and country necessitated stage-coaches and teams of every description, and on all main roads might be seen four and eight and ten horse drawn wagons conveying merchandise to and from the city. As a matter of necessity, the taverns and hostelries were numerous and generally well patronized.

The building of the Marlboro Branch of the Fitchburg Railroad in 1849 marked an important era for Assabet Village. It also marked the beginning of the end for stage-coaches. Originally chartered as the Lancaster and Sterling Railroad, the land was acquired June 6, 1846, but construction was not started until after it was acquired by the Fitchburg Railroad, which had been chartered in 1843. Entering the village at the north side from Acton, and crossing through the village near the center at a southwesterly angle. The location of the railroad was a matter of considerable machinations of those who were straining to route it through their backyard, so to speak, and those who deemed it a dirty and noisy nuisance, filling the air with clamor and soot and scaring valuable horses.

The operators of stage lines fought the new railroads. One man who had very large interests in the stage-coach business, a man of great influence, a "General Holman", was bitterly opposed to the railroad. But the stage-coach was passing, as all methods of transportation do, only to be replaced by some new method. And, so the Marlboro branch was laid from the main line in South Acton, through Assabet Village, Stow and Hudson and Marlboro. The "Iron Horse" put the stage drivers out of business. *The first train, carrying passengers, arrived July 1850.*

The first station in town was near the Sudbury Street crossing. When a new station was built on Main Street (now the site of Gately's Service station) the first station became a freight house and

remained so until a few years ago, when the property was sold and a gasoline station erected near the site.(Now the Humble Oil Company).

Amory Maynard was one of the prime movers in securing the right of way, and was given a life pass over the railroad. He was appointed station agent, which position he held(in his name)for about forty years. As many as twenty-four trains per day ran through the town, and long freight trains hauling coal and materials to the woolen mills.

Trains ran on an hourly schedule in each direction, to and from Boston, from early morning until late at night. Passenger and freight service was excellent until the 1920's. The automobiles and trucks were making serious inroads and the number of trains gradually reduced. Passenger service was discontinued beyond Maynard April 29, 1939. Freight service stopped shortly afterwards and the tracks removed from Maynard to Hudson. The last passenger train in and out of Maynard to South Acton was in the evening of May 16, 1958. It was a sad occasion for many who had lived with the train running in and out of Maynard every day of their lives. To them nothing quite equalled the excitement of a steam locomotive coming into the station. A deisel engine now makes daily hauls of freight to and from Maynard, to take care of the needs of the Maynard Industries(formerly the American Woolen Company mills.)

As the horse and buggy age drew to a close --- while the automobile was still a novelty --- New England went through the electric car era. In August 1901, the Concord, Maynard and Hudson Street Railway company, with headquarters in Maynard, began operations. On August 18, 1901, the first electric car was seen on the streets of Maynard, when an open car was run from the car barn on Great Road to the

Boston and Maine Railroad crossing on Main Street, dragged across the railroad tracks and re-railed on the opposite side. The following morning temporary tracks were laid across the Assabet River bridge on Main Street, and the car was run across. At 1 P.M. on August 19, 1901, a trial trip was made to Concord Junction to connect with the part of the line operating between Concord Junction and Concord. By late August the road was completed between Hudson and Concord and on October 1, 1901 a regular schedule operating. The line connected at Wood Square, Hudson, with lines of the Worcester Consolidated Street Railway and the Boston and Worcester Street Railway. Also, at Monument Square, Concord, with the Lexington Street Railway. It was possible to ride almost any place in the country by "trolley car" on connecting lines.

On May 8, 1900, the Lowell, Acton and Maynard Street Railway company was incorporated to build a line from Maynard through Acton, Westford, Carlisle and Chelmsford to connect with the Lowell city system. Nothing was done until late 1901 when the Lowell, Acton and Maynard Street railway, by then under the Concord, Maynard and Hudson Street railway petitioned for an extension of its charter and right to build from Maynard through Sudbury to Framingham. In May 1903, the Lowell, Acton and Maynard began construction of a line from the Concord, Maynard and Hudson line in Maynard at Main and Nason Streets, extending up Nason Street, through Acton, Haynes and Brown Streets to the Boston and Maine Railroad crossing at South Acton. September 18, 1903, the first car ran over this line. In 1909, a line was laid from South Acton to West Acton and the first car over the line was on September 2, 1909. For nearly a year the line between Maynard and ~~South~~^{West} Acton was operated in two sections -- cars running between Maynard and the south end of the South Acton bridge -- and between the north end of the bridge and West Acton.

Passengers had to travel the fifty yard gap on foot. On August 15, 1910 cars were running across the bridge. In 1911 the idea of completion of the line to Lowell was given up.

United States mail was carried on the electric cars between Concord Junction and Gleasondale. Freight service was never used. Before World War I years the ride between Concord and Hudson was a pleasant one, the cars running along what was then tree-lined roads. On warm summer nights the open cars were crowded and every car was out on the line. Everyone shopped on Saturday nights in those days. Maynard, known chiefly as a shopping center, was in the days before prohibition an "oasis of refreshment" in a desert of no license --- Concord, Acton and Stow. Thus, while the men visited the emporiums the women shopped at the many stores in the center of the town; all returning home with their purchases on the last "trolley" for the day.

In July 1902, the Board of Railroad Commissioners issued a permit to the Boston and Western Electric Railroad to construct a high speed electric line between Marlboro and Waltham, with a branch line from South Sudbury to Maynard to join up with the Concord, Maynard and Hudson line at Main and Walnut Streets. Plan was dropped when the Selectmen would not go along with the proposal to enter Maynard by way of North Sudbury, coming down McKinley Street to Walnut Street to the Concord, Maynard and Hudson line at Main Street.

The Concord, Maynard and Hudson Street Railway prospered until 1917. They found it necessary to ask for financial help from the towns served by the line, but did not meet with success. On January 25, 1918, a disastrous fire destroyed the car barn and practically all rolling stock, severely crippling the line. For more than a year they operated with borrowed equipment. The automobile was then becoming the major method of conveyance. The electric line hung on until 1921 when it was

forced into the receiver's hands on December 20. They continued to run at a loss and on January 16, 1923 the Superior Court ordered the line to cease operating immediately. The rolling stock was sold in February 1923, and the tracks, poles and wires were sold on September 17, 1923, and dismantled. (Some of the tracks could be seen until quite recently at the corner of Nason and Acton Streets. It is my belief that the rails have been removed completely from the Main Street; but they still exist on Nason Street.) The power station on Great Road was sold to the Polish Catholics and is today St. Casimir's Church. The carbarn was used for several years by the Lovel Buss Lines, Inc. Later by the Raytheon Company and at present by the Atkins & Merrill, Inc. The house formerly occupied by the superintendent of the street railway is now a two family house at 67 and 67a Great Road.

The Woburn and Reading Bus Company, John F. Lovell of Woburn the owner, moved right into the town on Friday, January 19, 1923, with a large bus and began irregular trips from Maynard to South Acton and return. On Monday, January 22, began a regular schedule on an hourly basis. After permanent franchises had been obtained from the five towns Lovell started bus service over the old Concord, Maynard and Hudson line, following the present Route 62 the entire distance. Buses to Concord began on February 26, and to Hudson on March 23. This they later extended to Arlington Heights and to Clinton and Leominster.

By 1954, the Lovell Buss Line was out of business and service between Maynard and Concord only taken over by the Middlesex and Boston Street Railway, which is now a part of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. At the state election November 8, 1966, the citizens of Maynard voted two to one (1951 to 1931) to join with the M.B.T.A, for which the town of Maynard is annually assessed a share of the operating costs

with thirty-nine other cities and towns served by the M.B.T.A.

Although the Concord, Maynard and Hudson Street Railway has been out of business for more than forty years many traces of the old lines, in addition to the power-house, carbarn and superintendent's house remain. Also, traces of the Boston and Maine Railroad from Great Road to the Stow line.

Both the Boston and Main Railroad and the Concord, Maynard and Hudson Street Railway performed a vital transportation service in the towns for many many years. They failed because the lure of the private automobile was too great ^{for} ~~for~~ the patrons who deserted these lines for their own cars. The "Iron Horse" and the "trolley cars" were no match for the "horseless carriage". And without financial support from the towns presently served the bus line may soon follow suit.

Perhaps, I should add a postscript and say that for a number of years we also had motor boat service up and down the river from Maynard to Lake Boone. (This has been written in a separate ^{monograph.} ~~story~~)

Credit.- The Maynard Enterprise
Hudson's "Annals of Sudbury, Wayland and Maynard"
Crowell's "History of Stow"
Gutteridge's " A Brief History of Maynard"
Birger Koski
O.R. Cummings "Concord, Maynard and Hudson Street Railway"
W.P. Currier, Passenger Traffic Mgr., Boston and Maine R.R.