



Journey by Land:

Footpaths, Cart Roads, Post Roads & Turnpikes

Footpaths

The Wampanoag used footpaths, established by long use, to move between settlements and seasonal camps. Paths lead between spring sites for gathering plants and fishing and summer cornfields. These narrow paths were not always the straightest link between two places. People created the paths for ease and convenience, avoiding steep hills and crossing streams at shallow fords.

Major paths, like the Nemasket Trail, connected Wampanoag communities. The Nemasket Trail ran between the settlement of Patuxet (later Plymouth) on the coast, west through Titicut and Nemasket (Middleboro) and south to Mauntap (Mount Hope) on Narragansett Bay. Other trails led to territory occupied by other tribes. The Bay Path ran northward to Massachusetts land. The Wampanoag traded with neighboring tribes for exotic materials like unusual stones.

Many of these paths were later used by English colonists and became cart roads and eventually, highways. Today's Route 44 follows the basic route of the Nemasket Trail. Much of Route 53 goes along the Bay Path, and Route 18 along the line of the Satucket Path.

adapted from Old Plymouth Colony Indian and Pilgrim Trails

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The Pilgrims used oxen to pull wagons. Once the Puritans landed in Boston, Plymouth residents made a good living trading livestock to the newcomers. They walked the cattle from Plymouth to Boston via the Bay Path.

Travel on horseback took considerable time. In 1713 Samuel Sewall of Boston observed, "Mr Winslow of Marshfield comes to Town; Set out so long before Sunrise that he was here about 3. p.m."

Cart Roads

The Pilgrims used footpaths to visit their Native neighbors for trade, diplomacy and other purposes. They also created paths to link Plymouth to new settlements, like Duxbury, Marshfield and Scituate to the north.

Around 1627 the Pilgrims established a trading post at Aptuxet, on the Bourne River at Buzzards Bay. There, they traded with the Natives and the Dutch. Before long a footpath was created, linking Plymouth with Aptuxet.

At first the Pilgrims had no draft animals, so they had to walk. After 1623, when Edward Winslow brought cattle back from England, the Pilgrims began to use oxen to pull plows and wheeled carts.

Horses were imported about 15 years later. Soon after the establishment of Boston in 1630, the Pilgrims used the Bay Path to bring trade goods like livestock to the new settlement. Not everyone owned a boat. While more difficult, walking did not cost anything.

In 1692 Plymouth Colony became part of Massachusetts Bay Colony. Boston became the capital of the entire colony. Transportation to Boston was now more important than ever, for trade and for government. Samuel Sewall and other judges traveled to sessions court at county seats in Plymouth and Barnstable. Travel along the narrow dirt roads was a challenge. Col. Isaac Winslow of Marshfield served on the Governor's Council and frequently had to travel between Marshfield and Boston. A diary entry from 1713 reveals that it took him from dawn until early afternoon to ride the twenty-odd miles on horseback!

Post Roads and Turnpikes

18th-century roads were notoriously bad. Each town was supposed to care for its section of through roads, recruiting citizens to repair roads each spring. This didn't always happen, and the dirt roads were heavily rutted and muddy. Winter was the easiest season to travel, as the roads were frozen and people could use sleighs. Spring was the worst season to travel.

The need for communication during the Revolution caused the establishment of the first national postal system in 1776. Post riders rode horseback between Cambridge and Sandwich via Plymouth once a week. While no longer a capital, Plymouth was a county seat and market town. The post rider dropped mail off with town postmaster William Watson, who notified the recipients to collect their mail. The journey was long over 60 miles of bad roads. The 20 mile trip between Plymouth and Sandwich took five to six hours! Eventually the mail was carried by stagecoach.

After the Revolution, New York eclipsed Boston as the north's most important port. The need for good communication between the two cities caused post roads to be constructed. These new roads were straight, level and kept in good repair. The water route to New York, along the Plymouth coast and around Cape Cod, was not only long, but dangerous due to the shoals along the Outer Cape. With new roads, the land route was faster and safer. There were three routes between Boston and New York. Two passed through Providence, which began to grow in importance accordingly. Today, part of the old post road passes near Green Airport off US 95. Some of US 1 also follows the eastern post road.



Surveyor's Compass

Maple, ash, brass; New England, 1750-1800

Descended in the Wadsworth family of Duxbury.

A "circumferenter" like this one was used in mapping land or roads. The surveyor set the compass on

a tripod, then swiveled the brass sight vane to specific landmarks to determine angles. Length (in acres or rods) was measured by using chains. Each link was about 8 inches long.

With the growth of new industries after the war, businessmen needed good roads to transport goods. If publicly maintained roads didn't work, private roads might. Financiers organized turnpike companies to build toll roads. Travelers passed through a gate (or pike) upon paying toll. Most of the turnpikes in southeastern Massachusetts passed inland, connecting Providence with Boston, bypassing Plymouth and the coast.

Turnpike Fare Schedule from Massachusetts General Act, 1805

Coach, chariot, phaeton, or other four-wheel spring carriage drawn by two horses (additional horses 2c a piece)	.25
Wagons drawn by two horses (additional horses 2c a piece)	.10
Cart or wagon drawn by two oxen	.10
Curricule	.15
Chaise, chair, sulky, or other carriage for pleasure drawn by one horse	12.5
Cart, wagon, or truck drawn by one horse	.0625
Man and horse	.04
Sleigh or sled drawn by one horse	.04
Horses, mules, or neat cattle, led or driven, each	.01
Sheep or swine by the dozen	.03
Carts or waggons having wheels, the fellies of which shall be Six Inches broad or more, shall be subject to pay only half the toll which carts or waggons otherwise constructed, shall be liable to pay	

Stagecoaches, Carriages & Carts

Stagecoaches

Road improvements led to the establishment of stagecoach lines after the Revolution. Service between Boston and Sandwich via Plymouth began in 1796. The journey took an entire day. The stagecoach left Boston at dawn, arrived at Plymouth in time for dinner, and reached Sandwich in the evening. Drivers changed horses every few miles.

Coaches had been carrying passengers between cities since the early 18th century, when a stage line between Boston and Bristol, RI was established. From Bristol the traveler could reach the nearby port of Newport, avoiding the dangerous trip around Cape Cod. In the 1770s travelers could take a stagecoach from Boston to New York, a week-long journey.

Stagecoach travel was difficult. The coaches had bad suspension and were not heated. Josiah Quincy described the week-long journey between Boston and New York: "We reached our resting place for the night, if no accident intervened, at 10:00, and after a frugal supper, went to bed with a notice that we should be called at three, which generally proved to be half past two, and then, whether it snowed or rained, the traveler must rise and make to help the coachman lift the coach out of a quagmire or rut..."

Stagecoach drivers sat on the outside of the coach in all weather. One driver filled this jug with hot water (or rum) to keep him warm. Driving a coach could be a dangerous job. In 1841 driver Phineas Pratt was killed when loading a heavy trunk. When it slipped, he fell off the coach and struck his head.

Coach drivers left from specific inns in the center of towns. In Plymouth, passengers could pick up the stagecoach at the Pilgrim House on the corner of North and Court Streets.



Stoneware Jug
"Boston" potter, 1804-1810

Taverns were located every 7-10 miles, like Cornish's Tavern on Sandwich Road and Hall's Tavern in Sandwich. Other lines ran from Boston to Providence via Taunton.

By the 1840s, stagecoaches and steamboats competed for business. Plymouth historian William T. Davis recalled a race between the two conveyances when he was a young man. Both left Boston at the same time. With three changes of horse teams, the stagecoach reached Plymouth in under four hours, just as the passengers were disembarking from the steamboat!

Carriages and Carts

Carriages first appeared in Massachusetts Bay in the 1680s. Due to the poor condition of roads, carriages were used mainly for in-town travel by the wealthy. As roads improved, more people bought vehicles, both for personal travel and to deliver goods.

Styles of carriages changed with the times. Chaises became popular around 1800 or so. In the 1840s Senator Daniel Webster drove himself around Marshfield in a four-wheeled cart called a phaeton. Two-wheeled hacks were used in the 1870s. Public buildings like Plymouth's Town House had hitching posts for people to tie their horses while in town. Those who couldn't afford to own their own carriage could rent one at one of Plymouth's many livery stables.

With improved roads, craftsmen and farmers could more easily drive wagons to town to sell their goods. Vendors traveled from towns like Norwell or Kingston down through south Plymouth to the Cape every few weeks.



Grocers used horse-drawn carts to deliver orders to customers. Horse-drawn carts continued to be used into the 1940s.

Railroads

The Iron Horse

In New England the pioneering railroad lines of the 1830s and 1840s were improvements to existing transportation systems like turnpikes and stagecoach routes. Most rail lines connected with ports, reflecting the importance of shipping to the New England economy. Small branch lines, used for passengers and freight, were built between the 1840s and 1860s. In southeastern Massachusetts, they were consolidated under the Old Colony Railroad in the 1870s.

Developments in harnessing steam power made locomotive engines possible. The faster trains were an improvement over stagecoaches and wagons. The first railroad line in Massachusetts connected Boston and Providence, an important stop on the land route to New York. Completed in 1835, the 44 mile journey took about an hour and a half. The following year the Taunton Branch Railroad opened, connecting Taunton to the Boston/Providence route. The line was extended to New Bedford in 1840, linking industrial Taunton with the port city.

In 1845 the Old Colony line was built, connecting Plymouth to South Boston via Abington. The journey took just under two hours. Most rail construction was concentrated inland rather than along the coast. Inland towns like Abington, Bridgewater, Middleboro and Taunton had burgeoning industries which were helped by economical freight transport. 1846 saw the completion of the Fall River Railroad, between Braintree and Fall River via Middleboro. The Cape Cod Branch Railroad, which ran from Boston to Sandwich via Middleboro, also opened in that year. Service was gradually extended, reaching Provincetown in 1873. Plymouth had no rail connections except to Boston until 1892, when the Plymouth and Middleboro line started service. The new line linked Plymouth with the many lines running through Middleboro, including service to Cape Cod and Providence.

While intended for freight, the railroad attracted passengers in unexpected numbers. By the 1840s there was considerable competition between stage lines and railroads. Each tried to attract travelers by offering free dinner at coaching inns and depot restaurants. The faster and more reliable railroad soon replaced the stagecoach for mail delivery and passenger transport. All towns were not accessible by rail, however, so stagecoaches were still needed as links.

The 1880s and 1890s was an era of rail consolidation, as financiers like J.P. Morgan of the New Haven Railroad bought up branch lines. In 1893 the New Haven leased the Old Colony's track line and rolling stock. Railroads were part of a regional system which carried passengers and freight to the north via Boston and south via Providence.



After World War I, the federal government's attention shifted from railroads to building new highways. Starting in the 1930s, the increasing use of cars posed an additional threat for the railroad. Use dropped 50% between 1923 and 1949. Service was gradually cut, and local service ended altogether in 1959. Only the link between Boston and Providence remained.

Railroads Today

By the 1980s car travel, which had contributed to the end of rail service in the 1950s, had become difficult. Over the next two decades rail service gradually resumed on the South Shore and Cape Cod, both for commuting and tourism.

Excursion trains were the first to roll in Cape Cod. In 1981, the Cape Cod and Hyannis Railroad, which ran excursion service between Hyannis and Sandwich, was established. The novelty of old trains, with scenic views, attracted visitors. Service expanded the next year to Falmouth and Buzzards Bay, with tours along the Cape Cod Canal. In 1984 the railroad began weekend service from Braintree to Hyannis, geared toward summer visitors. Amtrak saw the attraction of rail service to Cape Cod, and began a line between New York and Hyannis. While cuts in state subsidies hurt the recreation train business, the Cape Cod Scenic Railroad still operates excursion service.

The volume of commuter traffic contributed to the revival of train service in the South Shore. While the Southeast Expressway was built for efficient transportation between Cape Cod and Boston, the increasing volume of car traffic soon doubled the commuting time during rush hour. The need for increased public transportation became apparent in the 1970s, when the Red Line of the "T" was extended to Quincy Center. The "T" was extended to Braintree in 1980.

By the 1990s, it was apparent that the "T" from Braintree and bus service from Plymouth were inadequate to transport the volume of travelers commuting to Boston. Compliance with the Clean Air Act also required better public transportation. In 1997 the commuter railroad was extended from Braintree to North Plymouth. Many commuters from the South Shore ride the train to work in Boston. The train has the potential of turning Plymouth into a bedroom community of Boston. That same year service also reopened between Boston and Middleboro, via Brockton.

Trolley Ho!

1880-1920 was the Age of the Trolley. Cities and towns across America used cars on rails to carry people to work and school. As America's economy changed from rural to urban, more people worked outside of the home in factories and offices. Some towns used horse-drawn cars, while others used

cable or electric power to move the cars.

In the 1880s, the nearby city of Taunton had a horse-drawn railway, as did Boston. Plymouth originally planned a horse-drawn system, but chose to experiment with new electric streetcar technology. Plymouth became the second or third American town to have an electric trolley system (Richmond was the first).

In 1889 the Plymouth and Kingston Street Railway had almost four miles of track with five electric cars. The name "trolley" comes from the pole which "trols" (hangs) from an overhead electric wire. In 1900 the trolley was absorbed into the Brockton and Plymouth Street Railway, which ran 24 miles from Manomet (south of Plymouth) to Whitman, where people could change for Brockton.



Trolleys were used by commuters to get to factory jobs. The trolley route passed many factories, including the Plymouth Cordage Company in North Plymouth. Children also rode the trolley to school.



1905 Commercial Route Survey showing rail lines and trolley lines.

Peak trolley use was in summer, when vacationers took the streetcar or railroad to amusement parks like Mayflower Grove (in Pembroke), Silver Lake Grove (in Kingston) and Nantasket Beach (in Hull). Spur lines were added to Fresh Pond and Sagamore Beach for vacationers starting in 1916. The end of the line was the Pilgrim Hotel just south of central Plymouth. Tourists could pick up the trolley at the railroad station and take it to the ocean-front hotel.

Trolleys were expensive to operate, as not only the cars but the tracks and electric poles and lines had to be maintained. In the winter the tracks had to be cleared by special snow plowing equipment.

As cars became popular after World War I, the street railroad system began to suffer. In 1922 the Brockton and Plymouth went into receivership, and was reorganized into the Plymouth and Brockton Street Railway. The company continued to have financial problems, and in 1928 abandoned the street railway for a bus system.

The Amazing Automobile

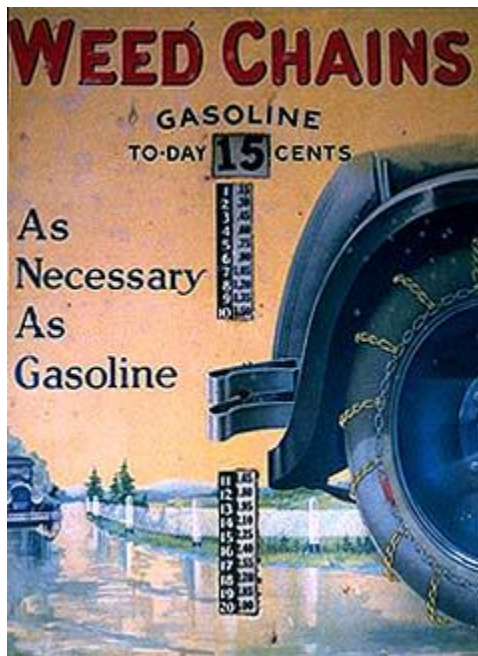
Automobiles became popular in Massachusetts after World War I. Families who could afford a car generally had just one. People often used cars for recreation— visiting relatives, Sunday drives and excursions to the beach or lake. Not everyone could afford a car, however, and many people continued to use streetcars and trains.

The first automobile clubs in New England were founded in 1900 as social clubs "devoted to the sport of automobilism." Driving was more of a hobby than a mode of transportation, as cars were an expensive novelty. Early cars were open to the elements. Drivers wore goggles and canvas car coats for protection.



Cars caught on slowly. Many workers rode the streetcar or walked to their jobs. With the improved production in the 1910s of Henry Ford's Model T, cars were more affordable.

By the end of World War I, auto taxis were threatening to undermine the streetcar system. In 1918 the state passed the Jitney Act, forbidding car shuttles to compete with trolleys. The automobile eventually helped drive the streetcar out of business by the 1920s.



Before the invention of snow tires, drivers wrapped chains around their tires for winter traction. Snow removal was not as thorough as it is today. Many older Plymouth residents remember winters when snow stayed on the streets until spring.

After World War II, many families owned a single car. Often the father (or primary wage earner) used the car to get to work. The rest of the family still used the bus to get to the store or visit relatives. On Sunday, the family used the car for recreation. With a car, families no longer had to live near a bus or train line to get to work, and new neighborhoods grew. Railroad service on the South Shore was discontinued in 1959, as most people used cars to get from town to town.

With both parents working, most families today own two (or more) cars. Besides commuting, families use their cars for shopping and other errands. One recent effect of car ownership is the relocation of grocery stores from downtown areas to roads on the edge of town. Before, groceries were delivered or people walked to neighborhood shops. Today, people drive to strip malls with large parking lots where banks, grocery and drug stores have relocated.

Highways

Once turnpikes were phased out, state and local governments once again took control of roads. The Massachusetts Highway Commission was established in 1893, and began appropriating money to care for roads the next year. With an increasing number of automobiles, old roads had to be paved. The state began numbering roads around 1928, making it easier for travelers to find their way.

The original Route 3, the main road from Plymouth to Boston, ran inland along the current Route 3A. Summer tourism was an important industry on the South Shore. Many visitors escaped hot cities to stay for weeks in cooler beach communities like White Horse Beach in Manomet. Around 1933, a new Route 3 was laid out, to relieve overcrowding of the old coastal route. New sections of highway were built to link existing old roads from the Bay Path. Depression-era work programs also created new camping spaces in Myles Standish State Forest and at Nelson Beach in Plymouth. People traveled by car to the South Shore for inexpensive camping vacations. New roads were also important for business and industry.



As early as the 1920s, town officials discussed a bypass road to improve travel to Cape Cod. Businessmen worried that the bypass road would divert summer tourist business. The first bypass (Westerly Road) was only a two-lane street! Construction of a new Plymouth-Kingston Bypass, a limited access highway, began just after World War II with the highway bridge in Kingston (now exit 9) in 1948. By the late 1950s the superhighway extended from Boston to Hanover. The last section was completed between Duxbury and Kingston in 1964, and the highway named Route 3.

Highways have had a significant impact on work patterns. With fast highways, workers could commute to jobs many miles from their homes. Unfortunately, too many cars using Route 3 have caused overcrowding and pollution, and the commute during rush hour now takes as long as it did before the superhighway was built! Planners have embarked on the next solution, the Big Dig. In the meantime, commuter train service has been restored between Boston and the South Shore.

The highway has been important for tourism. Highways stimulated growth of motor hotels and roadside shops for summer visitors