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## **Early Transportation, Worcester Turnpike, B&W Railroad, Trolleys and Bicycles**

### **Early Transportation -17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

Transportation has always been essential to communities. This was particularly so for Framingham as it grew into a bustling trading center.

One of the earliest interior roadways in the Northeast was an Indian trail known as the Connecticut Path. It was a shortcut from Massachusetts to the fertile Connecticut valley. In 1633, John Oldham and three friends traveled this path, passing through Framingham on their way to the Connecticut valley. They entered the area at the north end of Lake Cochituate and then traveled south to the Great Beaver Dam, which was just above Waushakum Pond.

The first settler, John Stone and his family came to the Framingham Plantation in 1647 from Sudbury. Other families soon followed. Most of these early settlers built their homes near or along the Connecticut Path. According to John Temple's *History of Framingham*, by 1699 there were 70 families with a population of about 350 in Framingham.

In the mid 1600s, the settlers began to lay out bridal paths and roadways to connect homes, farms and businesses within the community and to surrounding areas such as Sudbury, Marlborough and Watertown. Foot, cart and horse bridges were built to make it possible to cross the area's swamps, streams and the Sudbury River. The usual modes of travel through the woodland paths and roadways were by foot and horseback. People might also own a cart or wagon. Wagons were used to transport heavy loads such as bricks and wood. Dugout canoes may have been used by settlers along the Sudbury River and the connecting ponds for fishing and transportation.

A family usually traveled by foot. But, they might travel on one horse to church or for a friendly visit. Father would sit in the saddle with mother behind him on a pillion (cushion) with a baby in her lap. Perhaps a small child would be seated in front of father or behind mother.

By the 1700s, as the settlement grew, additional roadways were laid out to the new town meeting house, to businesses and the surrounding homes. Raymond Callahan in his book, *Framingham Historical reflections*, mentions that Framingham had 29 streets accepted by the local government before 1800. Better roads brought large wagons, chaises and carriages for transportation in the latter part of the 1700s, but they were expensive for people to buy.

### **The Worcester Turnpike –19<sup>th</sup> Century**

#### **The Central Turnpike**

The Worcester Turnpike was chartered by the state and was built and operated by a private corporation—the Worcester Turnpike Corporation.

A 40 mile stage route between Worcester and Boston with Framingham Centre as its midpoint opened in 1810. The Corporation shareholders set up four tollgates along the route in order to redeem their investment. Stephen Herring lists these typical toll rates in his book, **Framingham, An American Town**:

One Person On A Horse	4 cents
Two-Wheeled Vehicle With One Horse	10 cents
Four-Wheeled Vehicle With Two Horses	25 cents

Approximately seventeen coaches stopped in Framingham Centre each day.

Abner Wheeler and his brother Benjamin, owned a hotel, tavern and store on the common. They also operated the stage office where the horses were changed, repairs were made and travelers could stop for meals and relaxation. For the Wheeler brothers and the many other enterprises in and around the Centre Common, business grew and flourished. (See Daniel Bell painting) A second turnpike, the Central Turnpike, from Boston to Hartford, opened in 1824 and was finally completed in 1830. It passed through Framingham on what is Waverly Street today, from the Natick line to Winthrop St.

The opening of the railroad in 1835 drew travel away from stage coach transportation, which led the Worcester Transportation Corporation to close the Pike in 1843. The Central Turnpike closed in 1836.

### **Boston and Worcester Railroad**

A faster and more efficient means of transportation was the steam engine. The Boston and Worcester Railroad (B&W) planned to reduce the time it took to get from Worcester to Boston from a day long trip to hours. It was said that the train could reach a speed of 20 miles or more in just one hour.

Two routes were surveyed for the placement of the railroad. The proposed route, which was to pass through Framingham's Centre village, was the best location to place the tracks. But, the Worcester Turnpike was still in business and the Wheeler brothers and others opposed this plan. The B&W obtained a right of way for a route two and a half miles to the south, away from the Centre and the Turnpike. The rails would pass from West Needham, through Natick, to Clark's Corner and Park's Corner in Framingham, and then into a section of Hopkinton called Unionville. (Ashland Center)

The first train, rolled into Framingham's little shed-like depot on September 20, 1834 at 3:15. The "Yankee," a six ton train, looked like a series of stagecoaches set on iron wheels. After a brief stop in South Framingham, the train took on water at Farm Pond, built up steam and continued to its final destination. At 3:30, the train arrived at Unionville, which was the end of the line.

In 1835 the tracts were completed and the train traveled from Boston to Worcester. A ticket from Framingham to Boston cost seventy-five cents in the summer and one dollar in the winter. The Saxonville branch of the Rail Road opened in 1846 followed by Milford in 1847. In 1850, a branch was built that connected South Framingham with the Centre.

Expansion continued to areas beyond Framingham. By 1880, Framingham was an important link to The Old Colony Railroad with trains to the north and south and to the Boston and Albany Railway. A new stone depot was built in 1884-1885. It was designed by noted architect, Henry Hobson Richardson. In 1975, the station was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

About one hundred passenger and freight trains arrived and departed from the Framingham Depot daily. Business began to boom around the railroad station.

### **Trolleys**

A private company, called the Union Street Railway Company, laid tracks along Howard Street, Concord Street and Union Avenue to accommodate trolleys. The system, like the trains, converged in South Framingham. In 1888, the first *horse* drawn cars carried shoppers and workers to the downtown business district on these tracks. Several years later, horse drawn cars began to disappear in favor of the *electric* trolley.

Before the turn of the century, an electric trolley system was developed. Overhead wires connected streets in Framingham and eventually connected Framingham to surrounding towns. At the turn of the century, the Boston and Worcester Street Railway Company laid track along the old Worcester Turnpike to transport passengers between the two cities. The fare was twenty cents. In an hour and fifteen minutes travelers were at their destination.

### **Bicycles**

Bicycles were manufactured in Framingham at the Hickory Wheel Company. In the 1990s, as road were straightened, leveled and surfaced with gravel, bicycles became very popular. They were used for recreation and transportation. In 1892, the Town had 600 registered bicycles. Although there appeared to be convenient means of travel, the new “horseless carriage” would be the new mode of transportation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.