



**Allston Street, Beacon Hill, Boston, 1950**

# The Pattern of New England Settlement as Exemplified by the Properties of the Society: together with a comparison of ancient and modern routes of travel

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THE peoples of the world today are perceiving their own desires with a new clarity. Europe and Asia, hardly accustomed to making plans for themselves, and certainly not yet able to create states which serve individual lives, nevertheless are setting out toward a goal where the responsibility of the state is for the welfare of the people. The previous conditioning of these masses has been so strongly against individual responsibility that the trail breakers sometimes discover they have been going in circles only to find themselves confronted by a new dictator. To increasing numbers, panic and confusion suggest removal to a country where they believe that these problems were solved successfully two hundred years ago. Those who stay behind experiment with attachments to leaders who claim to have found the only path toward the improvement of everyday life. We on this shore who are not such recent immigrants, but who feel our way of life to be a personal family tradition, are inclined to forget that with the exception of those who seek wealth through power, and power through leadership, that all peoples throughout the world want only those things described in "The Four Freedoms." It is for us to help them find it, not to draw our (inherited) mantles about us and seek to avoid pollution.

We could feel justly snobbish about the fact that our own predecessors accomplished two hundred years ago what our new arrivals have only recently come to

seek, were it not that the responsibility for modern objectives is ours, and not that of our ancestors.

The forebears who started the weaving of our national fabric in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and left it to us to continue, did, however, leave us as a tool with which to work the experience and precept of lives spent in gaining the same simple and humble ends that today the whole world at last is seeking. There is a very obvious and inevitable parallel between the ideologies of the successive generations of those who have made the western voyage across the Atlantic. To none of them has the perception of personal responsibility nor of possible accomplishment been so clear as it was to those who came knowing that no civilization awaited them here; that on these unfamiliar shores there would be land to clear, a house to build, a town to organize, and a nation, or communal ideology, to fight for; and that their survival and success would be measured by their own physical and moral strength as individuals.

Their lives have left an imprint upon ours: sometimes confusing, like superimposed footprints, sometimes clearly defined, as in the document of our Constitution. There is always a question whether their national ideals should survive or whether new ones will evolve. It is a time for re-evaluation.

How can we evaluate our heritage without an inventory of our heirlooms, however? How can we keep house without

knowing what is in the attic? What is this national fabric which we have inherited? Is it homespun, or satin, or both? What were the desires, traditions, and handicaps which made up the lives of our predecessors and formulated the culture of New England and the other American colonies, and which so strongly color our way of life today? Is there any sense in the fact that the chain stores, in November, are full of women with kerchiefs on their heads, negotiating in broken English for turkeys and cranberries?

Here is a Society engaged in preserving the antiquities of New England. How many of its some seventeen hundred members really feel sure that they are not merely pandering to an individual weakness in cherishing the dusty objects which are the detritus of past lives? Should we not, if we were abreast of the times, welcome bulldozers to 141 Cambridge Street to make way for a new housing development of chromium and plate glass? Would the people who lived in such a building know or care whether they were living in Boston or Budapest?

A house is an outer garment to ourselves: it can be flamboyant, according to our tastes, or designed to shelter, according to our environment. It takes on the shape and odor of our lives. Such is your house today; such were the houses of our forebears. Only to the very young or very unimaginative are houses of an earlier day or an unfamiliar culture interesting merely as curiosities. The side show of a circus would be more rewarding to such a person; or among architectural curiosities, no ancient buildings could approach the amazing features of the mid-nineteenth-century's towered Victorian mansions, the magic wand of the great radio tower which ironically stands as a terminal axial feature to Longfellow Park in Cambridge, or the misty heights of the

Suffolk County Courthouse rising above the gabled roofs of old brick houses like the vision of some eighteenth-century dreamer.



### Old and New on Beacon Hill

SUFFOLK COUNTY COURTHOUSE FROM  
BULFINCH ST., BOSTON

The properties of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, like libraries, are only worth visiting as sources of information. They are only significant to the degree in which they offer data useful to us today. Like the objects in a museum, these houses are only of value as they are original and genuine products of a specific culture of interest to us today, and we can only expect them to be visited, like a museum, by people in search of information assimilable by their own cultural appetite. These houses do, however, preserve and exhibit concepts which today are of specific usefulness, and of which the significance will increase in the future.

Our literature, our history, and the physical products that remain, such as these houses, are the sources from which the modern citizen can gain insight into the beliefs and customs by which he is busy living. These houses are the products, and were an integral part, of the communities in which they were built. The materials and methods by which they were constructed reveal the physical char-

acter and resources of the neighborhood in which they stood. The character and contents of the houses record the character of the communities which surrounded them. The taste and style in which the houses were designed and furnished record as clearly as in a book the beliefs and objectives of their builders, the cultural horizons of their eras, and, indeed, the state of the nation in their day.

This year, as never before, the Society's houses are drawn closer together by the speed of automobiles and by the smoothness of paved highways. When some of them were built there were no roads; linking others were single-track dirt roads. Few of them were built when there were more than a few turnpikes joined by side roads. Only the later ones were built when it was known what lay beyond the Mississippi. It is possible now to retrace in a day or an afternoon a journey that would have taken a week or a month in 1800, and for that reason one has to take all the more pains to visualize the intervening spaces which gave the houses their setting.

It seems appropriate at the outset of our season for summer travel for this Society to consider the opportunities offered its members in visiting the Society's properties throughout New England. A study of the map will suggest the possibility of grouping such visits in areas suitable for pleasant trips of a day or more as desired, and at the close of this article will be found a chart giving such groupings and mentioning eating places along the way where food is served in a setting appropriate to such a journey.

Such trips for most of our members would be survey trips of reacquaintance, not only with the Society's properties, but with New England itself, and might include many points of interest in each area visited. The houses thus studied will pro-

vide great variety among themselves and also in the differing scenic character of the parts of New England concerned, for the range which both represent is wide in chronological sequence, economic development and native character.

The New England scene as wrought upon by man, like that of all settled areas, is the combined result of human objectives at work upon the geologic base. Between the works of nature and those of man, the balance gradually changes with length of occupancy, until we have cities like New York where the works of nature at first glance are hard to find. And yet each ton of concrete and steel which today stands there is a proclamation that New York has the Atlantic seaboard's best harbor, and even the names in its telephone book are a reminder of the fact.

In this article the author will try to provide a guidebook to the past, to scratch away some of the later works, and lead the reader back to the original ledges, streams and forests, by means of footpath and ferry, turnpike and stagecoach, stopping at an ordinary or two for refreshment and gossip. The reader must be warned, however, not to expect to pass his time listening to rustic humor, for the people whom he might find in such places were as much affected by European politics, and as much concerned about national policies, as any of us today—indeed, more so.

As for the scenery: what we mean in the words "typically New England" results from a racially monobasic settlement existing for a comparatively long time in the midst of a setting that is geologically ancient and worn and extraordinarily varied. The white spire seen in the distance poking through a cluster of tree-tops, the familiar weathered farm group of barn, silo, shed, and haymow, the street of white frame houses are New

England, whether the backdrop is mountain or ocean.

Though this picture did as a whole develop with unbroken sequence from its earlier and far different aspect, this evolution did not fan out in a regular pattern from the areas first inhabited. During the seventeenth century, location of settlement within areas of grant was rigorously controlled by geologic factors; ocean, ports, and streams brought the tide of settlement, while the barriers of forest and mountain restricted it. Settlement therefore spread most rapidly up and down the coast, and to a lesser extent along streams, rather than directly inland.

The earliest New England settlements—Plymouth in 1620, Portsmouth in 1623, and Salem in 1629—were the vague focal points around which cluster the Society's oldest houses and those maintained by other groups. They were not the names of towns as we know them today, but covered large tracts which have been encroached upon by subsequent towns. Thus we have the "Scotch"-Boardman house built in 1651 in Saugus and the Rebecca Nurse house in Danvers, built in 1678, both originally in Salem, and the Jackson house in Portsmouth, built in 1664. Among the settlements which followed streams, there are Ipswich, settled in 1634 with our Preston Foster house built in 1640, our Emerson Howard house built in 1648, and a group of others not owned by the Society. In Newbury, an offshoot of Ipswich settled in 1635, there are several seventeenth-century houses, among them our Tristram Coffin house, built in or before 1650, and Swett-Ilsley Tavern, built in 1670. Brought inland by the Charles River, the Cambridge-Watertown settlement of 1633 contains, in Cambridge, the Cooper-Frost-Austin house, built in 1657, and in Watertown, the Abraham

Browne house built in 1698. The latter was built on the old Indian trail leading to the southwest, and the only route in that direction for generations to come. Twenty-five years before the house was built, the importance and accessibility of this location had been increased by the laying out in 1673 of the Bay Path, which began at Watertown and ran through Framingham and Lancaster, and thence directly to Brookfield and Springfield. At its best points, it would have looked only like a forest logging road of today, although its use was constant. The Coffin house was also built on one of our earliest trails: that which connected the shore towns and ran through Newbury to the ferry on the Merrimac. This has become our present Route 1, and on a map made in 1774 and published in William Fadan's *North American Atlas of 1777* it is still the only road shown in eastern New England.

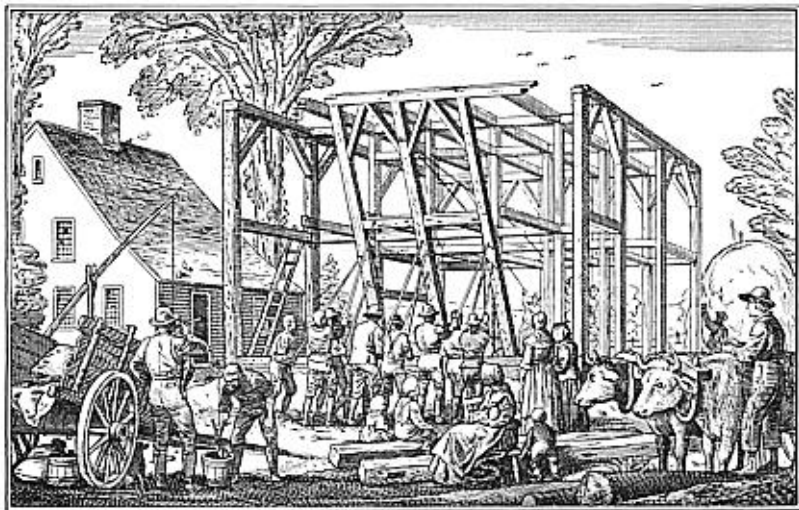
The other houses mentioned—those in Ipswich, and the Jackson house—show the visitor at a glance that he was expected to arrive by canoe. The unusual brick house of Peter Tufts built in Medford in 1678 was also a "river house," this area along the Mystic having been settled in 1630.

In studying seventeenth-century houses, the modern visitor should make an effort to visualize the setting which alone explains their fortress-like character, for they were built at a time when no neighbor was within sight, when they were surrounded by unbroken forest in which the only openings were made by streams, harbors, and marshes, or the cleared fields immediately around them. Arriving at such a place after his journey, the early visitor must have felt relief at coming to a spot that had been so humanized, and where there were people to talk to.

Such a journey would have been made

on foot or by water, for the early settlers used the same means of transportation as did the Indians. Those few who owned horses had to keep them for labor, and the lack of bridges, particularly along the coast where creeks and river mouths were widest, made riding difficult. Birch canoes were used along streams and shore, and for deeper water they used the dugout, a hollowed pine log about twenty feet long

method of travel, known as the ride and tie system, suggests the scarcity of horses. Two travellers would start, on the same horse, ride a mile or two, dismount, tie the horse by the path for the following couple who had started out on foot, who then rode past the first couple, tied up the horse for them, and so on. Women rode sideways on pillions. These were cushions strapped on behind the saddle and were



### A New England Barn-Raising

by two and a half wide. A fine example found in Squam Lake, New Hampshire, is in view in our museum. When Bradstreet was sent to Dover as Royal Commissioner, he walked the entire distance and back by narrow Indian trails.

When he came to a river, the foot traveller could progress by ford or by fallen trees which were placed across streams by order of the colonial government. If he were very important or pernickity, Indian guides would carry him across pickaback. Ferries when established were customarily canoes, a doubtful aid to a man with a horse. An accepted

sometimes provided with a suspended platform for the feet. For their security they depended on a firm grip on the man in the saddle in front, and a limited view of the dark shadows ahead.

The colonists soon imported more horses, however, and bred them. Breeding of the Narraganset Pacer, which early came to be popular as the best of bridle horses, was started in the seventeenth century and only abandoned at the end of the eighteenth when vehicles became common.

There were a few coaches in England in the first half of the seventeenth cen-

tury, but the condition of the roads there made them unpopular, and in New England they were impossible. John Winthrop had one in 1685, and there were a few carriages in Boston at this time.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the seventeenth century settlement location was economically controlled by the dependence of the early colonies on England. Accessibility to English imports kept the towns near the coast, while availability of material for export—fish, fur, and lumber—kept them opening up new locations along the shores of Connecticut and Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maine. It is for these reasons that seventeenth-century houses are not found far inland. In the late seventeenth century, a friend wishing to attend the house-raising of the Clemence-Irons house in Johnston, Rhode Island, or the Eleazer Arnold in Lincoln, Rhode Island, would have gone from Watertown to Natick, and then through Millis and Wrentham to Attleboro, and he probably would have needed an Indian guide to keep him on the trail. The early settlements of Rhode Island and Connecticut had been reached by ship along the coast, but because Cape Cod made this a long and hazardous route, a short cut was soon taken inland by means of the Bay Path, the Connecticut Path, and the Providence Path. These ancient Indian trails at first were only two or three feet wide, and had been worn equally deep by unknown generations of moccasined feet.

<sup>1</sup> Types of carriages first used were calashes and chariots (Henry Sharp had a calash in Salem in 1701); chairs, which were two-wheeled gigs without a top; chaises, two-wheeled gigs *with* top; and the sulky, which, as now, seated only one person. Sedan chairs were plentiful and popular in England, and were used in our cities throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Sleighs were not much in use before 1730, the horse alone being more practical on an unplowed road.

Holland wrote of the Bay Path: "No stream was bridged, no hill graded, no marsh drained. . . . It was the channel through which laws were communicated, through which flowed news from distant friends, and through which came loving letters and messages. . . . Every rod had been prayed over by friends on the journey and friends at home." These paths, travelled many years, widened slowly from foot to bridle width, to cart track, to carriage roads, until they became the post roads along which communities grew up like beads strung on a thread.<sup>2</sup>

These were about the only "through highways" during our first hundred years of settlement. Travel, however, was widespread at an early date, and although the condition of most roads remained so poor that in the early nineteenth century much travel was still by horseback, nevertheless people got about to a remarkable degree.<sup>3</sup> In 1717 the son of Waitstill

<sup>2</sup> Probably the earliest of these trails was the Old Plymouth or Coast road provided by the action of the General Court in 1639. It connected the capitals of the two colonies, Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, and ran through old Braintree. The present routes 128 and 3 follow it fairly closely, passing several of our properties on the way. The Connecticut Path went south from Wayland to Framingham, southwest to Hopkinton where it branched, the northern route going from Oxford to Springfield and on to Albany while the southern went to Woodstock and then to Hartford via Bolton Notch. The Providence Path intersected it at Woodstock, Connecticut, and went southeast to Providence and Narragansett. The Nipmuck Path also branched off at Woodstock and went to Norwich. The famous Bay Path has been described above. An inspection of these towns will reveal something of their history.

<sup>3</sup> This event apparently took place about 1785: "In the spring of that year I attempted to pass a river, called the Great or Lower, Ammonoosuc; at a fording place, about forty miles Northward of Dartmouth College. The stream is remarkably rapid: and had, the preceding

Winthrop proposed to bring his coach from Boston to New London, and received a letter of warning from his father, reminding him that there were no bridges in Narragansett, that he must bring a mounted servant with him "to cut bows in the way," that he should "bring a good pilate that knows the cart wayes," to "keep the coachman sober," and to have "axles and hubs built for rough usage," and generally discourages the rash endeavor.<sup>4</sup>

To provide "refreshment for man and beast," taverns and ordinaries were licensed as early as the mid-seventeenth century and came into being almost with the beginning of each town. They were an important part of the civic life, and the only part of it that was equally important to "out-of-towners." Those which the Society is endeavoring to preserve should be regarded in relation to their value to the community and not as some slightly off-color drinking places of the past. As roads developed, taverns came finally to be spotted along them every ten or fifteen miles, this being the distance of an ordinary day's travel, and as recently as the 1920's, the *old* Worcester Pike (before renovation), the Boston Post Road, the Newburyport Turnpike and the nameless but historically significant road

night, been swollen by copious showers of rain, and the dissolution of snow, on the grounds adjacent. a number of persons with whom I was in company, went over in a boat: but some circumstances induced me, and two or three others, to attempt to ford the river. About midway of the passage, my horse was turned upon his side; apparently, by the force of the current." There follows a long account of how the traveller was nearly drowned. From *Travels in New England and New York* by Timothy Dwight. (Complete sources are given in the bibliography at the end of this article.)

<sup>4</sup> From *Customs and Fashions in Old New England* by Alice Morse Earle.

from Cambridge Common to Fort Ticonderoga, and doubtless others, were still conspicuous as ancient and important highways by the frequency of old taverns along them. And many of these are still with us for a short, a very short, while longer, though few still offer the hospitality for which they were intended.



**Tavern, Francestown, N.H.**

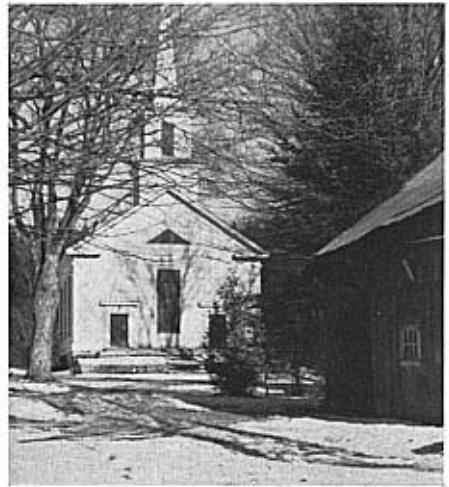
The importance of the tavern was not, in the sober seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as a roistering place. It was as important to the road as the railroad station is to the train. To the town it was a necessity as a center for information and news in a day when no newspapers existed. It was the official posting place for public notices, the communal guest house in a day when homes had only one or two overcrowded rooms, the post office where anyone who had hopes of getting a letter could come and look the mail over, the call center for civilian defense through long years of constant danger, and the public forum in days before the radio took away the opportunity to answer back and air individual opinion. A traveller who had to go part way by water, as was frequently the case, could leave his horse at the tavern to have it returned, or could obtain a new one when needed. He could stop there to rest his horse or borrow a fresh one, to gather information about directions, distances, and

road conditions ahead, in a day when maps were almost nonexistent and never accurate. Towns covered large areas but offered little in the way of a town center. In almanacs, distances between them were given as between taverns rather than towns. In Hartford and other towns establishment of taverns was compulsory, though strictly controlled by local ordinance. Because of their previous importance in civic life, the Society is fortunate in having under its care taverns of various periods such as the Coffin and Swett-Ilsey houses in Newbury, Merrell's Tavern in South Lee, Conant Tavern in Townsend Harbor and Crocker Tavern in Barnstable.

The tavern keeper was a person of responsibility to his neighborhood as well as to the stranger, and was of good family and reputation, was well educated, and was often an officer of the local government. His services and hospitality were sometimes greater than his pay, and these qualities and his "good food and good lodging" have been attested in many journals and letters of grateful travellers.

In the eighteenth century, the crowding of coastal locations and the establishment of agriculture and industry started a migration inland. The increasing threat from French and Indians caused a breaking out of new roads to the northwest toward Albany, Lake George, Lake Champlain, and Canada, in order to prevent a penetration of the English colonies from that direction. A string of forts was built along the northwestern frontier, now roughly marked by our Massachusetts-Vermont boundary line, and north of this, by the valley of the Connecticut River. As the need grew for frontier towns inland, these forts and roads became the nuclei for towns, while at the same time settlement was retarded in unprotected areas. All eighteenth-century

towns in Vermont, such as Bennington and Marlboro, came into being in this way, and no early eighteenth-century house will be found in Vermont except along such routes, for Vermont as a whole was not settled until about 1790.<sup>5</sup> Early houses which grew up along important roads were Stetson, Hanover, 1694-1716; Colton, Longmeadow, 1734; Royce, Wallingford, 1672, both on the



### Town Hall, Stratton, Vermont

AT CORNER OF ROAD TO FERU. (THIS ROAD ONCE APPROXIMATELY MARKED THE CANADIAN-VERMONT INTERNATIONAL BORDER)

Bay Path; Harrison, 1680, in Branford on the Shore Road; Mawdsley, 1700, in Newport; the Jewett house in South Berwick, Maine, built in 1774 on the coast road.

<sup>5</sup> A Revolutionary toast made by Capt. William Watson at the Eagle Tavern, East Poultney, Vermont:

"The enemies of our country—may they have cobweb breeches, porcupine saddle, a hard trotting horse, and an eternal journey."

This tavern was on the road from Bellows Falls, an ancient crossing place of the Connecticut River, to Skenesborough, outlet of Lake Champlain.

By mid-eighteenth century the tide of settlement had found new courses, and about this time towns came into being in places where there were new reasons for their existence. The intersections of important highways, such as Newburyport, Massachusetts, Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire (the Ayer Junction of its day), Woodstock, Connecticut, were the inevitable seed beds of towns. Along unfordable streams, the crossing places such

crucial location. They had every likelihood of developing into a Springfield or a Pittsfield until, by chance, they were bypassed by new routes. The increasing use of water power and development of mills brought the earlier mill towns. With the close of Indian terrorism, the great fertile inland intervalles had become occupied, and these created the towns along the middle reaches of the Connecticut River, the upper Housatonic, and many in New



### **Mill at Cambridgeport, Vermont**

BUILT OF SEAM-FACED GRANITE, IT SPANS THE STREAM IN A SERIES OF SKILLFUL ARCHES

as Bellows Falls, Walpole, Brattleboro, and Hinsdale on the Connecticut, Shelton and New Milford on the Housatonic, and Haverhill on the Merrimac became junction points of highways. The head of navigation for larger boats on streams, such as Windsor Locks, Albany, Concord, New Hampshire, acquired new importance. Today throughout New England many a remote country crossroads still possesses all the beginnings of a city: tavern, meetinghouse, parsonage, town hall, hitching sheds, country store, and a

Hampshire and Maine. To this category belong the Daniel Marrett house, in Standish, Maine, built in 1789, Bleakhouse, built in 1770 in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and Merrell's Tavern in South Lee, built about 1760.

Wherever highways were important enough to be improved for the accommodation of wheeled vehicles, towns sprang up along them at what might be called "tavern distance" apart. Sometimes the tavern preceded the town, as was the case with Conant Tavern in Townsend Har-

bor, Massachusetts. The town was settled in 1732, and this thoroughly romantic tavern was built in 1720, long before the days of stagecoach, on a road which helped carry British and American soldiers to the northwest. Its site was chosen at a sort of jumping-off place, a point where the highway comes to its front door and a stream comes up to the back. It is logical that during the Revolution, British and Tories are said to have made this remote tavern already familiar to them a rendezvous for escape to Canada. The original character of its site, as well as its structure, are extraordinarily intact and give the visitor a vivid impression of an exciting past.

The close of the Revolution permitted an energetic and daring expansion of maritime commerce. The old ports, especially those which were state capitals, bristled with shipping and legislation and blossomed into cities of mansions and counting houses. To this era belong the Hooper-Parker house in Marblehead, the Gov. Langdon Mansion, built in 1784 in Portsmouth, and the Harrison Gray Otis house in Boston, built in 1795 as the residence of a legislator.

The release from war also brought about a tidal wave of western immigration, and among the settlements which were founded farther and farther inland, it becomes increasingly obvious that the character and quality of architecture is determined not so much by its date as by its environment. In Portsmouth, one of the oldest and certainly the most cosmopolitan of the old port cities, the carving of ornament in the Langdon house could only have been done by highly skilled or imported labor. The framing shows a technique and ingenuity which suggests ship's carpenters. At the same time, equally intelligent men in a place with fewer

resources were in Vermont building log cabins.<sup>6</sup> The contents of the larger mansions of this period show the great increase of travel of all kinds. The remotest corners of the earth were not too far away to be the source of a lady's fan or a set of chessmen, and the houses were full of the paraphernalia of travel: bandboxes, leather-covered trunks of all sizes and shapes, and folding kits more exquisite than useful. Of these our museum possesses an eloquent collection.

And yet, twelve years before the Harrison Gray Otis house was built with all its dignity and sophistication, maps were made showing the Mississippi Valley as inhabited only by various tribes of Indians, and indeed, "out West" referred to western New York State.

It was the restiveness and appetite for expansion of this period which brought about the development of turnpikes. Where previous roads had wound unpaved, ungraded, and undrained, around every hillock and pond, avoiding every obstacle, new roads were now laid out by compass shortening the distance be-

<sup>6</sup> "A log-house is built in the same manner as the weekwams, which have been constructed in later times by the Indians, and which were mentioned in a former letter, as having been derived from the Colonists. The logs, intended for this purpose, are chosen of one size, and hewn on two opposite sides. They are then cut down to half the thickness at each end, on one of the hewn sides. After this, they are laid upon each other at right angles, and fastened together with wooden pins so as to form the external walls of the building. In this manner they are carried up to a sufficient height; and covered with a roof, usually of shingles. The crevices are then stopped with mortar; and the interior is finished according to the fancy, and circumstances, of the proprietor; always, however, in a plain, and usually a coarse and indifferent, manner." From *Travels in New England and New York* by Timothy Dwight.

tween cities and ignoring all differences in grade.<sup>7</sup> Causeways called "causeys" were built through swamps, and bridges both of wood and stone over streams. It is to this period that the covered bridges belong, and the beautiful old stone ones with the perfect arches. Much laborious



**Double-arched Stone Bridge**

NEAR STODDARD, N. H.

masonry of this era is still in evidence along old highways. It can be seen on route 119 in Massachusetts in the town of Ashby.

When the Worcester Pike was laid

<sup>7</sup> "Dear Sir, Tuesday, September 20th, 1803, I set out with Messer. H- S-, and D-, of Yale College, and Mr F-, a member of the Senior Class, on a journey up Connecticut River to the Line, which in the 45th degree of North Latitude divides New-England from Lower Canada. The first day we proceeded to Hartford: thirty-four miles.

"In my account of the journey, which I took to the White Mountains in the year 1797, I mentioned that a better road was projected, and had been made, than that, in which Mr L- and myself travelled from New-Haven to Hartford. By the direction of the Legislature a straight line was run between these towns; and the following year, Commissioners were appointed to lay out the road, with a continual reference to this line. The design was followed too scrupulously, perhaps, for the convenience of travellers. In one place only, does it diverge

out, straight as an arrow over hill and dale, it was expected to become the main route to the West, and wooden rails were laid down the center of it on which horse-drawn coaches travelled at unprecedented speed. Because these highways did not just grow, like the previous roads, but were built all at one time and financed by group investment such as towns and stock companies, the turnpikes themselves took on a fairly uniform and characteristic appearance which is still recognizable to-day where it has not been effaced. They were of a width for two galloping stage-coaches to pass with fair safety, doubtless shouting as they did so—say eighteen to twenty feet wide. On either side are widely spaced and uniform stone walls about fifty feet apart which kept cattle out of the way and which show that the same men built long stretches of the road. The Newburyport Turnpike until very recently showed these characteristics. Many such pikes are discernible on modern road maps by their straightness, even though they are now shown as secondary roads and are given no designation. One such goes straight northwest from Provi-

to the distance of one hundred and nine rods. Had a less rigid attention been given to the scheme of making a straight road, several disagreeable hills might have been avoided, much of the expense prevented, and the distance very little increased. As it is, it is one of the best roads in the State. It also presents a greater variety, and a more uniform succession, of fine views than most others of the same extent in this country. It shortens the distance between New-Haven and Hartford about five miles. The first fourteen miles it runs on the West side of the Wellingford river; thence through Meriden, and along the Western margin of the Middletown range to Worthington; and thence through the parishes of New-Britain and Newington, and a corner of Wethersfield, to Hartford." From *Travels in New England and New York* by Timothy Dwight.

dence to Douglas and doubtless once kept on to Worcester or beyond.<sup>8</sup>

The houses and taverns which lined these roads were large and substantial, usually with four chimneys symmetrically arranged around a hipped roof, and

<sup>8</sup> "We left Providence, Monday October 20th, and crossing the state of Rhode-Island through the towns of Johnstown, Scituate, and Coventry, entered Connecticut at Sterling, and rode to Plainfield: thirty miles. The road after leaving Providence lay for two or three miles on a pine plain; and was tolerably good. It then became stony, and ill, or rather not at all, repaired. After dragging uneasily over several tedious miles, we came to a road, begun in the turnpike manner, and tolerably well made; which lasted, though not without several interruptions, ten or twelve miles. The former disagreeableness of the road was here renewed; and we proceeded with sufficient difficulty, till we came to Sterling; where we were again relieved by a turnpike road. . . . The people of Providence expended upon this road, as we are informed, the whole sum permitted by the legislature. This was sufficient to make only those parts, which I have mentioned. The turnpike company then applied to the legislature for leave to expend such an additional sum, as would complete the work. The legislature refused. The principal reason for the refusal, as alleged by one of the members, it is said was the following: that turnpikes, and the establishment of religious worship, had their origin in Great Britain: the government of which was a monarchy, and the inhabitants slaves; that the people of Massachusetts and Connecticut were obliged by law to support ministers, and pay the fare of the turnpikes, and were therefore slaves also; that, if they chose to be slaves, they undoubtedly had a right to their choice; but that free born Rhode-Islanders ought never to submit to be priest-ridden, nor to pay for the privilege of travelling on the highway. This demonstrative reasoning prevailed; and the road continued in the state, which I have mentioned, until the year 1805. It was then completed; and free born Rhode-Islanders bowed their necks to the slavery of travelling on a good road." From *Travels in New England and New York* by Timothy Dwight.

with the improved transportation, the use of brick became common. Such a house can be seen on route 20 in Watertown, Massachusetts. The Samuel Fowler house in Danversport, and the Woodbridge house in Salem show characteristic urban design of this period. Many such houses and taverns survive in remote places where one glance at their appearance is enough to set one looking about for the traces of the highway which once went past their door. Such a tavern is the one in Francestown, New Hampshire, and illustrated here. At Putney and at Grafton, Vermont, there are others on once-important routes.

The turnpikes were often built as a speculation, and therefore were toll roads controlled by bars or pikes across the road which could be turned to permit passage. Hence the origin of their name. In the Society's museum files are photographic records of some of the old tollhouses. The editor of the Providence *Gazette* wrote at this time:<sup>9</sup> "We were rattled from Providence to Boston in 4 hrs. 50 mins.—if anyone wants to go faster he may send to Kentucky and charter a streak of lightning."

Companies running the stagecoaches also became a matter of investment and speculation. By 1827 sixteen hundred stagecoaches were reported as arriving at and leaving Boston per week. In 1818 the Eastern Stage Company, chartered in New Hampshire, announced as its route: "From Portsmouth nine AM, dinner at Topsfield, thence through Danvers and Salem: back the following day, dining at Newburyport." This company owned several hundred horses. On this line Henry Clay rode from Salem to Boston in an hour, and Daniel Webster rode at

<sup>9</sup> From *Customs and Fashions in Old New England* by Alice Morse Earle.

sixteen miles an hour from Boston to Portland to sign the Ashburton Treaty.<sup>10</sup>

It was at this period that "the country north of Boston" enjoyed its most prosperous agricultural development, later to be drained by the opening of the West. Converging upon Portsmouth<sup>11</sup> and Bos-

<sup>10</sup> Providence Stage, 1803. "A new line of stages will commence running on Monday, 2nd of January next, and will start from the Bunch of Grapes Tavern, State Street, in Boston, every morning precisely at 8 o'clock, and arrive at Providence the same afternoon.

"The Proprietors of these Stages have been particularly attentive to the neatness, elegance, and convenience, of their Carriages, the goodness and strength of their horses, the carefulness and civility of their Drivers, and have, and will use exertion for the accommodation of their Passengers.

"The Proprietors take this method to inform the public, to prevent impositions, that they are not accountable for any baggage unless receipted for from this date.

ASA FOOT  
ABEL WHEELOCK  
ISAAC TRASK  
GRAGG & EAST

From *Home Life in Colonial Days* by Alice Morse Earle.

<sup>11</sup> "On the morning of Wednesday, October 5th, we rode to Pascataqua Bridge, through Stratham and Greenland, fifteen miles; and in the afternoon, through Dover four and a half, and Somersworth, nine, to Berwick, ten and a half; in all twenty-five and a half miles. . . . We were however abundantly paid for this interval of dullness by the appearance of the bridge. This structure stands in a region, which gives it every advantage to make a striking impression on the mind. The Northern shore is rude, wild and solitary. A few lonely farm-houses were seen, scattered over an unpromising surface, and sequestered in great measure from human society. Around them was spread a confusion of rough rocks, and melancholy shrubs, and a gloomy cluster of evergreens. The river from half a mile to perhaps three miles in breadth, extending in full view for a great length, varied the prospect in a magnificent but very solemn manner. While occupied by this landscape, we came suddenly upon the

ton from these areas, the turnpikes brought flocks of cattle, sheep, and turkeys, guided by "droviers" who had bought the animals from door to door at distant farms. "Drovier's taverns" supplied pounds for the animals, and unventilated cubicles with bunks where the

bridge: an enormous structure, twenty six hundred feet in length; of an interesting figure; finished with great beauty and elegance; new; white; and brilliant.

Pascataqua Bridge is formed of three sections: two of them horizontal, the third arched. The whole is built of timber. The horizontal parts on wooden piers, or trestles, distant from each other twenty three feet. Of these there are one hundred and twenty six. Sixty one on the North-Western, and sixty five on the South-Eastern, side of the arch. The arch, like those of Haverhill bridge, is triple: but no part of the work is overhead. The chord is two hundred and forty four feet: and the versed sine nine feet and ten inches. This arch is the largest in the United States; contains more than seventy tons of timber; and was framed with such exactness, that not a single stick was taken out, after it had been once put in its place. The whole length of the planking is two thousand two hundred and forty four feet. The remaining three hundred and fifty six are made up by the abutments, and the island already mentioned. The expense was sixty eight thousand dollars.

"This is by far the most interesting structure, of the kind, which I have ever seen. Like the face in a well-contrived portrait, it is surrounded by such objects, as leave the eye to rest on the principal one, and the mind to feel but a single impression. The intention of erecting it was to open a communication between Portsmouth and the interior of the State, and to divert its trade from Boston, Newburyport, and Portland, by which it has hitherto been ingrossed. This bridge lies in a direct course to the heart of the State: and a turnpike road was originally intended to be opened from it, to Concord, on the Merrimac, and thence to Connecticut River. A company had been formed for this purpose, before we visited this country; and the road has since been completed.

"This scenery was exceedingly changed before the year 1813." From *Travels in New England and New York* by Timothy Dwight.

men could sleep. A stone tavern of this type survives outside of Keene, New Hampshire.

Today many modern highways follow the old turnpike routes which themselves may have been merely a straightening of the earlier trails. Routes 9, 1, and 1A out of Boston are examples which lead the traveller to properties of the Society. Less well known but equally interesting are routes 4, 16, 109, and 18.



Many towns of the turnpike era silently tell pathetic stories: their wide streets and large greens, their generous supply of white steeples, their ruinous dams and stone mills, their empty taverns and horse sheds say "I was once more important than the cities of today." Of these the towns of Ashuelot and Alstead, in New Hampshire, of South Berwick in Maine, of Byfield and Rowley in Massachusetts are examples. Many of these were the boom-towns of their day and represent the final flowering of New England as a place where in the cities all was elegance or slums, and in the country agriculture and rusticity flourished with dignity and importance.

This period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the time of Dickens in London and Boston, and in this country the great era of restiveness, ambition, and a new concern over trans-

portation. The future of turnpike versus canal, of steamboat packet versus sail, was hotly argued in senate chambers.

A lady once of my acquaintance, who would be somewhat over a hundred were she alive today, remembered hearing Dickens lecture at the Boston Museum, and at the age of fifteen was one of the last travellers by coach over a turnpike which is now a barely discernible trace through a Vermont forest.

This period was far removed from the communal labor and stern reality of the seventeenth century. It was during this time that the words "lady" and "gentleman" acquired new meaning, and the same ladies and gentlemen developed a finicky but sincere conviction that *even* the poor would get to Heaven if they washed, went to church, and were civil to their betters. Libraries, museums, missions, and summer resorts were founded. Good works among the ladies and financial speculation among the gentlemen opened new horizons, and a new unrest came into being. The words "industrial revolution" fail to imply what happened to the soul of the nation. Such towns were born as Lawrence, Brockton, Waterbury, Attleboro. Both the squalor of mills and the landscaping of the affluent formed an overlay upon earlier settlements. The frontier was pushed to the Mississippi, and soon beyond, draining the New England hills of their young men. I talked in the 1920's with a man whose mother had told him that she remembered watching a covered wagon leave the village of Whitingham, Vermont, with a family named Young. A small boy sat dejectedly in the back on an upturned dye bucket; his first name was Brigham.

Country residences like the exceptionally beautiful Gore Place in Waltham were built where once had been the earliest settlements or the far western edges

of the frontier. Such houses are the Forest Hall of the Barretts', complete with ball-room, in the then remote New Ipswich, New Hampshire, and the delicately Pompeiian Linden Hall of the Alexanders' in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Architecturally these houses represent the last of the great Renaissance dynasty which had started with the eighteenth century, just as the cultural lives of their owners were the last for some generations to come, before the intellectual curiosity characteristic of Renaissance thought became submerged by the cobwebs and crenellations of Romanticism.

On the coast, the towns in which these later houses were built had progressed

through an evolution from primitive to sophisticated, such as is represented by the time and culture span between the Jackson and Langdon houses in Portsmouth, the Browne house and Gore Mansion in Watertown, the Cooper-Frost-Austin house and Longfellow Mansion in Cambridge, and the Paul Revere and Harrison Gray Otis houses in Boston.

These houses not only tell the history of the towns in which they stand, and of the nation which their owners helped to formulate, but they are in literal fact museums, presenting to a newly questioning age the story of how our present civilization came to be and preserving the very background of our vision of the future.

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# PROPERTIES

or  
The Society for the Preservation of  
New England Antiquities

- = HOUSE
- ▲ = MEETING HOUSE
- ◆ = TAVERN
- = BARN OR OTHER BUILDING
- = GRAVEYARD

SEE LIST FOR DIRECTIONS  
FOR REACHING PROPERTIES  
AND FOR VISITING HOURS

## MASSACHUSETTS



New Haven  
By Barbara Clarke

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

- PETERBOROUGH
- NEW IPSWICH

●●●  
TOWNSEND HARBOR

## MASSACHUSETTS

## MASSACHUSETTS

