

Rail Transportation

Transportation from the earliest times, linking Duxbury with the outside world, is an interesting subject for study, bound up as it is with the growth of the community and welfare of its inhabitants.

From the primitive paths and trails of 17th century Pilgrim days, traversed on horseback and by rude conveyances, we can trace the gradual improving conditions that prevailed down through the 18th century with some roads and vehicles to meet the demands of travel and commerce. This was the age of the stage coach and tavern, the ox team and one horse shay (although there was then little pleasure riding,) with also of course, transportation by water, Duxbury being at this period a busy town with its fishing fleet and shipbuilding activities reaching out by sea to the four corners of the earth. Such conditions as these necessarily continuing, with little change, well into the 19th century, until the 1840s the advent of the iron horse ushered in a new era in state and nation which was to actively affect the development of all sections of the country for many years to come.

A review of how Duxbury and its neighbors met this rail problem during this period would seem to be well worth while, so the writer leaving to others to touch upon, perhaps the more picturesque days of the stage coach, will endeavor to bring out some of the historic facts and sidelights of the railroad era.

While the history of railroads in Massachusetts may be said to have begun with the opening of the Boston and Worcester Railroad in 1834, it was ten years later in March, 1844 when the first charter for a railroad south of Boston, was granted the Old Colony Railroad Company. This charter specified in great detail the route of the road from South Boston to Plymouth, a distance of 37 miles. Among its incorporators were several prominent Plymouth citizens. It had an authorized capital of \$1,000,000 and was constructed and opened to the public on November 10, 1845. This marked the beginning of the Old Colony Railroad which it may

be said in passing, came later through consolidations and mergers, to dominate the railroad field in southern and southeastern Massachusetts, growing from this original Plymouth line of 37 miles to 475 miles in 1880. This Plymouth line gave Duxbury its nearest point of connection at Kingston, reached from the town by stage or private conveyance. A local historian, touching upon this period, has this to say. "Mail and passengers were carried by stage coach running from Duxbury to Boston, a days journey, with a stop at the Halfway House at Hingham for dinner and a change of horses.

When the steam railroad reached Kingston, the stage coach took mail and passengers to the station there, to connect, leaving Duxbury village at 5.30 A.M. and returning to Duxbury about that time at night. During the short days of fall and winter, it was hardly daybreak when the stage reached Kingston and the journey to Duxbury was made in darkness only relieved by the dim lights along the way."

With this indirect connection, Duxbury citizens had to be content as it appeared for many years, although at the time it was felt that Duxbury should have its place on the railroad map. Indications of this restiveness is shown in the record of transportation charters obtained about this period. We note that on March 26, 1846, a charter was granted to Gershom B. Weston, William H. Sampson, John Hicks and associates for the South Shore R.R. to run from Quincy or Braintree to Cohasset and thence through Scituate, Marshfield and Duxbury. This charter was amended later to cover the line to Cohasset only and road constructed to that point, January 1, 1849.

As of April 7, 1847 we find a charter granted Josiah Moore, Samuel Stetson, Samuel Knowles and associates for the Duxbury Branch R.R. in the words of the charter, "to run from some point between house of Solomon Washburn and Andrew Stetson's shop in Duxbury to westward of dwelling of George P. Richardson to some convenient intersection with the Old Colony R R at ...

This plan was never consummated and became void.

The next charter action of interest is noted as of April 6, 1861, when a charter is granted to John S. Loring, Stephen N. Gifford and Joshua W. Swift, for the Duxbury Railroad Co., to operate from Kingston to Duxbury as a street railway by horse power. This proposition lapsed.

Again we find, on April 17, 1866, a charter is granted Gershom B. Weston, Stephen N. Gifford, Harvey Soule and associates for the Duxbury Street Railway Co., for a street railroad from Kingston to Duxbury. This also lapsed. Then on March 12, 1867, a charter is granted for the Duxbury and Cohasset Railroad Co. Incorporators, Amherst A. Frazar, Samuel Hall, Joseph G. Cole, Bailey Loring, Nathan H. Whitney, Stephen N. Gifford and associates to build a railroad connecting with the South Shore R.R. at Cohasset, with terminal at Duxbury ($17\frac{1}{2}$) miles. Authority was given for the three towns of Scituate, Marshfield and Duxbury to subscribe in cash \$75,000 each in capital stock. Ground was broken for the line Dec. 17, 1870, and completed and open for operation to Greenbush, June 15, 1871, ($6\frac{1}{4}$ miles). Just eight months later, from the beginning, in Dec. 1870, on August 17, 1871, it was in operation complete to South Duxbury. Authority having been previously obtained, the line was further extended from South Duxbury to Kingston and opened January 22, 1874. Mr. Stephen N. Gifford prominent in the town and a leader in the railroad undertaking served as one of the three directors during its period of separate operation as Duxbury and Cohasset R. R. Co.

Duxbury, at this time had changed much from its earlier years of commercial activity. Its shipbuilding and other business had mostly passed and its well-to-do sea captains had generally retired to a well earned leisure and built their substantial residences along the village streets. Never-the-less, the coming of the railroad had an immediate and beneficial effect in quickening the life of the town and soon proved its public worth. The influx of the summer resident may be said to date

from this time. Here, however, the other side of the picture should be mentioned, for from a strictly investment point of view the railroad never proved a dividend paying property. Capitalized at first by the three towns, and the South Shore and Old Colony R. Rs., its final construction cost was some \$450,000 and for its few years of independent management, as the Duxbury and Cohasset R. R. it showed about \$20,000 deficit in operation.

The railroad was fully absorbed by the Old Colony R. R. in 1878, the stock being purchased at a fraction of its original cost. The \$75,000 originally invested by the town less the small amount realized was treated as a railroad debt and gradually liquidated over a series of years. Not so pleasant perhaps, from one angle, but from another, an investment the town should never regret its participation in, for modern civilization demands good roads and free avenues of communication, the cost of which must necessarily be borne by the people, in direct or indirect taxation. The railroad has faithfully served its day and generation and now in this present automobile age, still has its place in the economic life of the town.