



*From dam'ng made under supervision of
George A. Griffiths*

SLADE'S FERRY

Courtesy Hotel Mellen

Chapter IV

POST ROADS – STAGE LINES – TAVERNS

Post Roads

Before 1800, the roads were hardly more than rough ways used by horseback riders and crude carts. A New Bedford history states that when the stage line to Taunton was started at the turn of the century, the lower branches of the trees had to be cut off before the coaches could use the roadway previously used only by riders and pedestrians.

Fall River's (then Freetown) most travelled road was the Assonet-Tiverton Post Road, with the branch to the Slade-Brightman Ferry. Travellers from Providence to New Bedford or from the "Four Corners" (Main and Central Streets) went via North Main Street to Steep Brook Corners turned east at Wilson Road then over the Yellow Hill Road (then called Wilson Road) to Hixville and beyond. The North-South traffic on Main Street was most important as most of the town's business was done with Newport, Assonet and Taunton the shire town.

Another through way was the Copicut Road, which was the shortest route for citizens of Russells Mills and South Dartmouth to reach the Court of General Sessions at Taunton. After Fall River was set off as a town, the records were filled with petitions in the warrants for repairs of this road but the town fathers were evidently frugal in their appropriations as the same request appeared year after year.

Another road out of town, which might be classified as a post road inasmuch as it was later traversed by stage coaches, was known as the Back Way or Back Road to Adamsville. At first traffic travelled south on Main Street to Stafford Street (Hamlet Street), east, across Eight Rod Way and south by Stafford and Crandall Roads. This route was used to avoid the hill on Second Street.

At first Fish and Fighting Rock, now Bell Rock Roads, were mere cart paths.

Fall River and Watuppa Turnpike Corporation

The road to New Bedford from the "Four Corners" was by way of Bedford Street (then Central Street) to "Quarry", south to "County", easterly and again southerly to the Narrows. Although it was called the King's Highway and later the Old New Bedford Road, it was in such a deplorable condition that in 1827 a group of Troy citizens applied to the Rhode Island Assembly for a charter to operate a turnpike along the present line of Pleasant Street starting approximately at the present corner of Thirteenth Street across a ford at the Narrows, to the Westport line opposite the house of Charles H. Macomber. The old boundary line was then in effect so the corporation operated wholly in Rhode Island.

The charter was granted to Nathaniel B. Borden, Simeon Borden, James Ford and others. Nathaniel B. Borden was president, Simeon Borden was secretary and Abner Green Davol collector. All three served the twenty-nine years the company operated.

The turnpike was to be 49½ feet wide and the company was instructed to erect a sign board with the rates of toll fairly and legibly written or printed thereon. This toll board is still in the possession of the Langley family, descendants of Abner Green Davol, the collector of tolls. The tolls were as follows and surely are of a forgotten era. For every "waggon", cart, truck or sled drawn by two horses or oxen, six and a quarter cents, with two cents for every additional beast; for every mail stage, coach chariot, phaeton or curricule, twelve and a half cents; for every chaise, chair, "sulkey", sleigh, calash or other pleasure carriage, drawn by one horse, six and a quarter cents, and for every additional horse three cents; for horse cart or wagon, with one horse, four cents; for a person and horse, two cents; neat cattle in droves, per head one cent; horses and mules, in droves, two cents; and for every swine and sheep in droves, half a cent. There were the following exceptions:—Toll shall not be exacted from any person or persons passing said toll gate for the purpose of attending town councils, town meetings, funerals or those going to or from performance of military duty, or the express purpose of agriculture or after a physician. The exceptions would seem to cover most all foot travel. Individuals afoot could easily avoid the collector at the toll house.

The proprietors could lower but not raise the tolls at any time. Shares were to be \$50.00 each and the amount of the capital stock was not stated in the charter but \$7000 in all was raised and the turnpike built. In 1838 the Rhode Island Assembly amended the charter to force the company to

erect and maintain a bridge across the Narrows in Tiverton. The company was allowed to pay up to 12% yearly under its charter and paid liberal dividends.

In 1865, after the boundary line had been changed, the Bristol County Commissioners made it a public thoroughfare and the county, City of Fall River and the Town of Westport refunded to the stockholders the \$7000 originally invested.

The toll house was on the south side of the "pike" where Stafford Square is now. The stream at this place then reached the roadway and the toll house overhung the water. Here Mr. Davol, the collector lived, hung out the toll sign, collected the tolls, received a monthly wage and in addition all collections after 10 p. m. The old toll house, after many movings and changes still stands north of Bedford Street between Robeson and Tremont Streets.

The pictures of the toll house and of Slade's Ferry were reproduced under the careful supervision of Mr. George Griffiths; one well versed in local facts and traditions.

The Stone Bridge and Fall River Turnpike

The Stone Bridge and Fall River Turnpike was also wholly in Rhode Island and the charter was granted by the Rhode Island Assembly.

The petition to incorporate was presented in October, 1837 by Nathaniel S. Ruggles, Thomas Tasker and Harvey Chace who became the incorporators. The first meeting was held at the home of Oliver Chace, Jr. and the charter was granted in January, 1838.

The tolls and general wording of the act followed closely the phrasing of the "Watuppa Company" but the tolls were almost twice as high. Thomas Tucker, Harvey Chace and William Canedy were the first directors.

The turnpike started at the Massachusetts-Rhode Island boundary line on land of Andrew Robeson, at the corner of what is now Bay and William Streets and ran southerly and westerly by the most convenient route to the Stone Bridge at Tiverton. The company was allowed to extend the roadway to Ferry Street in Massachusetts. Although this road would have "cut out" Townsend and Anthony's Hills in Tiverton, it was never used by the stage lines.

Construction was slow, for not until June, 1839 did "The Assembly" grant the right to erect a toll gate on Bay Street. In the meantime, a branch

road to the Tiverton (Globe) Print Works and Earl B. Anthony's store¹ on the Post Road had been completed. This branch is now Globe Street and from the wording of the Act probably existed as a lane previous to 1839. The Tiverton map of 1854 locates a toll house south of the one mentioned in histories which was at the corner of Chace and Bay Streets.

The line of the turnpike was Bay Street to the present state line, the right of way of the railroad to the "Stills" near Osborn's Wharf (Sinclair Oil Company) and from there to the foot of Anthony's Hill, the old road still parallels the railroad.

The Fall River and Newport Railroad took over the "Turnpike Company" in 1862; the same year the state boundary line was changed. A Fall River city record of March 2, 1863 shows a peculiar disposition of Bay Street stating "That so much of the road known as the Fall River and Stone Bridge Turnpike as is within the limits of the city be regarded as a Public Highway so long as for public traffic, its free use is allowed and that it be in charge of the Supt. of Streets and Highways and repaired as are others of the city." This makes Bay Street interesting as a street which is regarded as a public highway without definitely being so laid out.

The "Company" was not as prosperous as the "Fall River and Watappa Company" but when the "Railroad" took it over the stockholders received a part of their original investment.

Stage Lines

The first stage line from Boston to Newport which passed through the village of Fall River was started in 1797, by James Hidden of Newport, who called himself a "Stagedriver". It was short lived; Hidden stating, that just when the stage line was becoming prosperous, the destruction of the bridge at Howland's Ferry (Stone Bridge), in November, 1797 ruined his business and he lost his life savings and herewith applied for old age assistance.

In 1808, a line was placed on the road to run via Taunton, Berkley, Dighton² and Troy which used the bridge at Tiverton when rebuilt in 1810. A stage left Worthington's Tavern, Bromfield Street, Boston every day except Sunday at 5 a. m. and arrived at Newport at 6 p. m. if not delayed. The line was known as "the Newport Commercial".

Previous to 1808, the stages from Boston to Newport ran via Attleborough, East Providence and Bristol Ferry. By the new route the bridge

¹ E. B. Anthony's store was at Globe Corners, south west.

² Dighton passengers probably connected with the stage by ferry.



*From drawing made under supervision of
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TOLL HOUSE

Courtesy Hotel Mellen

at Tiverton dispensed with the undependable sail ferry at Bristol and saved a day on the trip. It was used by passengers to New York who, when they reached Newport boarded a fast sailing packet and thus saving two or three days over the shore stage line which took from four to six days depending on the season and road conditions.

Most of the glamour of stage coach travel is found in books and pictures for the roads were in dreadful condition. The stretch from Boston to Providence was called "tolerable" but west of Providence, the "pike" was always in a deplorable condition. For comfort and dependability, the stage line to Newport and the fast packet to New York were the predecessors of the "Boat Train" and the Fall River Line to New York.

The stage business became so prosperous that a holding company for the lines running out of Boston was formed which included "The Newport Commercial." The holding company thrived until the advent of the railroads when it vanished almost over night.

The stages of the Newport line carried six passengers and often a baggage wagon followed. The fare from Boston to Fall River village was \$4.00, later \$2.00. Stage line terminals were much sought after by taverns. Trask's, Boyden's and the Indian Tavern on Bromfield Street in Boston were the starting points in succession. This side of Taunton, stops were made at The French Tavern in Berkley, the Green Dragon³ at Steep Brook and Crump's Tavern at Tiverton. That part of the line from Boston to Taunton was discontinued when the railroad was finished to Taunton. The last stage from Fall River to Taunton ran July 1, 1849, four years after the Fall River branch via Myricks was opened.

Lest we think travel was luxurious, we note that two stage drivers were frozen to death on the local route and one of our citizens, living at the foot of Townsend Hill, day or night, winter or summer, when the stage horn sounded, stopped his work or jumped out of bed, harnessed a pair of horses and helped pull the stage over the hill, while men passengers plodded up the hill.

A stage line from Fall River to Newport was in operation until 1877; thirteen years after the railroad to Newport was completed. Passengers from Little Compton connected with the line at Tiverton which continued along the east road on the "Island"; a section distant from the railroad.

The Fall River-Providence line was started in 1825 by Isaac Fish. The first year, passengers only could be accommodated on the ferry. In 1826,

³ Fascicle I, p. 89.

a horse boat was first used and the coaches were transported. In bad weather, the boats often could not make the slip but they were equipped with aprons which allowed vehicles to be run ashore. Steam ferry boats came in 1847 and carried the stages until 1876, when the Slade Ferry Bridge was built and the stage line discontinued.

The Fall River-New Bedford line was also started in 1825. The first owner was I. H. Bartlett. It ran north on the Post Road to Steep Brook, then east on Wilson Road⁴ and Copicut Road to Hicksville and New Bedford. In 1838, a bridge was built at the South Narrows of Watuppa Pond and the line used the "Turnpike" and the Old New Bedford Road. In 1839, stages ran three times a week. In 1844, they ran every week day; three days via Hicks Meeting House, three days via Westport. A stage ran from Fall River to New Bedford daily on the arrival of the Providence boat. The regular New Bedford line was in operation as late as 1880 with A. Richards as proprietor. The Providence, Warren and Bristol coaches "intersected" the New Bedford lines. The Warren and Bristol line provided transportation every week day while at the same time stages to Providence via Swansea and Barneyville were available only three times a week.

In 1878, S. A. and J. C. Peckham started a stage line to Adamsville and Westport Harbor. Arthur C. Macomber took over in 1892 and his brother Charles D. Macomber five years later. This was a summer line and continued until 1925.

The longest lived of all was the Little Compton line. In the early days, it ran via Tiverton Four Corners and Adamsville. Later it dropped the Adamsville detour. T. K. Perry was the proprietor for many years. Church & Gifford were the last owners and they continued to operate until about 1915. In later years, the northern terminal was the Tiverton railroad station.

Rufus B. Kinsley was the guiding spirit of the important lines. At one time he was proprietor of all of them. His headquarters, at first at the Exchange Hotel on Rock Street moved to the Manufacturers' Hotel and as time went on, to the Pocasset House. After the fire of 1843, headquarters were established at the Slade House and finally at the Mt. Hope House. His office continued in the express business until absorbed by Earl & Prew.

Post Houses, Taverns and Hotels

In colonial days, the keeper of a post house, ordinary, tavern, inn or public house by whatever name it was called, was always a person of con-

⁴ Yellow Hill Road at that time was called Wilson Road.

sequence. They alone were allowed to sell victuals and liquor and as men of distinction in their community were generally public officials.

Court orders of the Plymouth and later Massachusetts Colonies were needed for the earliest public houses. Later (1786), the Court of Sessions of the Peace, composed of Justices of the Peace in the district and then (1827), the County Commissioners granted licenses.

The colonists brought with them English common law and customs. The "Ordinary" was the town's house of public entertainment and the village club house, providing food, drink and lodging. Some were victualers only; some vintners, dispensing wine, beer and cider or wine and strong liquor. Sometimes an ordinary, falling into disrepute, was restricted or closed.

Before the establishment of the first stage line, public houses of any sort were scarce within the Fall River area. Robert Miller had kept a tavern on the Post Road just north of the North Christian Church. It was destroyed by fire in 1775. Another tavern in the same locality was of short life.

Before Fall River became a town in 1803, Joseph and Stephen Borden were innholders at the village "Four Corners". In 1806, Phebe Borden, widow of George and niece of Stephen, moved from "over the pond" and opened the Mansion House on West Central Street near the Central Street entrance of the Durfee Theatre. In 1807, she married Major Bradford Durfee and together they conducted the inn until 1828. In its day it was the "genteel" hostel of the village and the only one. It had a very high stone post in front serving as a hitching and sign post.

The Brightman family at the Fall River end of the Slade-Brightman Ferry accommodated travellers as did the Slades and Preserved Brayton on the Somerset side.

The Green Dragon Inn which was located at the southwesterly corner of North Main Street and Wilson Road was, until stages ran from Providence and New Bedford, our only real post house. It still stands although much altered. It was there the stage horses were changed and travellers obtained victuals and liquor. The inn was run by Orin Eddy and the swinging sign over the door read—"Beer and Oysters and Horsekeeping". It was closed as an inn in the early eighteen thirties.

In 1825, Sabin Blake was running a public house at what is now the corner of North Main and Bedford Streets. It must have been of some importance for other businesses stated in advertisements that they were

opposite or next to Blake's Hotel. In 1827, Robert Cooke had an oyster house in the basement.

In 1829, James G. Bowen advertised in "The Monitor" the opening of an inn at Bowenville.

The Manufacturers' Hotel, which opened before 1832 was on the north side of Main Street just north of Central Street. It was owned by S. Sanford and a stage stable and booking office was opposite at the corner of Granite Street. It was destroyed in the fire of 1843.

In 1832, the "Pocasset Company" voted to erect a building and operate a hotel at the corner of the "Post Road and the Turnpike" (Pleasant Street). The stone building used for a stable still stands on the northeasterly corner of Pleasant and Second Streets. John Wilder was the first manager; followed the next year by Moses Lawton. It was a temperance inn; one of the few that were successful. It operated until destroyed by the fire of 1843. It had been a money maker and the shrewd Pocasset Company sold it in 1839 to Nathaniel B. Borden who maintained its popularity until the fire. Mr. Borden suffered the largest loss of any individual in the village by the fire. Twenty-six thousand dollars was a tremendous amount in those days. Neither the Pocasset House nor the Manufacturers' Hotel (the only inns in the village), were rebuilt.

There have been two "Exchange Hotels". The one on Rock was built by John C. Borden in 1827 as his private residence. In 1833, Mr. Borden died and the house became a hotel. A stock company was formed. The first proprietor was James Valentine, to be followed somewhat later by John D. Thornton. The hotel, situate where the Second District Court-house now stands, was the center of a large estate extending from Bedford Street to the Rodman Farm (See map of 1812) and from Purchase Street nearly to Oak Street. In 1840, the hotel was closed and the property acquired by Horatio N. Gunn. It was used by his family as a residence until torn down in 1910. The stone stable which was opposite on Rock Street was a stage headquarters operated by Rufus B. Kinsley. Later it was Kirby's Stable and was not demolished until 1904. The late Benjamin Buffinton stated that the "Gunn House", so called, was a remarkable structure in its day, with fifty-five rooms, hand carved mantels and window casings, with floors, ceilings and doors of hard pine and walls decorated by landscape artists.

We now start a new era after the great fire. In 1844, three hotels were opened, The "Massasoit" on North Main Street which lasted but a year,

The Union House on South Main Street kept by Sabin Blake, the former proprietor of Blake's Hotel. He sold it the next year to Charles Proctor. It soon closed.

The Slade House (See illustration Fascicle II) at the southwest corner of North Main and Elm Streets was a four story brick house, one of the largest and most pretentious in town. It had been the private residence of Nathan Slade. After the fire, Mr. Slade opened it as a hotel. At the opening, the thanks of a gathering of citizens were tendered Mr. Slade for his generous philanthropy and kindness in the hour of need. The residence was discontinued as a hotel about 1852.

In 1845, The Mt. Hope House, on the east side of Main Street between "Franklin" and "Bank" was erected by Dr. Nathan Durfee, Dr. Jason H. Archer and Mrs. Fidelia B. Durfee and was opened as a hotel under the management of William A. Waite. In 1863, Salmon Hooper was the proprietor who, with his son Charles E. ran the hotel until 1878, when it changed its name and management. From 1878 to 1902 it was the Narragansett Hotel. There were many managers. In 1895, John B. Porter was in charge and remained until it closed. The Bristol House, in the same location lasted until 1915. In the early years it was a stage headquarters with a stable in the rear.

The Evans House opened in the old Fall River National Bank Building⁵ and remained there for three years. In 1890, the hotel moved into the north end of the Mt. Hope Block where it took over the business of the "Norwood". William C. Evans, George K. Saville and Mark Samways were the managers. The south end of the block was torn down. The name Evans House is still readable on the north end.

Samuel Sanford of Boston opened the second Exchange Hotel in a brick block erected on the site of the Manufacturers' Hotel, in 1846. The first managers were Chamberlain and Jewett who came from the Broomfield House in Boston. Mr. Sanford also purchased the stone stable which was across Main Street south of "Granite", for the use of the hotel. Blake and Kirby ran the stable in 1855. This was the Kirby family that later ran Kirby's stable on Rock Street until 1904. In the December thirtieth edition of the "Weekly News" B. Hawkins announced that he would manage the Exchange Hotel beginning January 1, 1853.

In 1847, Mr. Sanford built a brick block on Central Street which housed eating and lodging rooms for seventy years. Dr. S. D. Richardson

⁵ See illustration Fascicle II.

of Boston acquired, in 1858, the brick buildings on Main and Central Streets from the estate of Samuel Sanford and the name of the hotel was changed to Richardson House. William Hodges was the first proprietor followed by William B. Niles in 1866. For eighteen years it continued as a lodging house under many different managers. In 1884, A. S. Tripp advertised one hundred twenty-five nicely furnished rooms, with a first class restaurant attached. There were entrances to the hotel on both Main and Central Streets. In 1905, the name was changed to Central House and Charles S. Hawes became manager. Thomas J. Marr followed him.

By 1914, William Durfee, whose father had acquired the property, remodeled the building and under his management, the Mohican Hotel became the city's largest hostelry, accommodating five hundred guests. It was destroyed in the fire of 1928.

Darius Wilbur, long known as King Wilbur (a most majestic man he was) opened a small restaurant in 1869, on the ground floor of a building on the northeasterly corner of North Main and Granite Streets.

The upper floors were first rented as tenements, then as the tenants moved out, Mr. Wilbur refurnished the rooms, finally converting the entire building into the Wilbur House, a hotel. There was no well on the premises. Before the introduction of city water it was obtained from a well on Bank Street and wheeled to the hotel in barrels. "King" Wilbur died in 1883 and his son George K. Wilbur operated the hotel until 1898, when he sold it to Marsden and Eagan. In 1902, William A. Leary acquired an interest and later became the sole owner. The building was destroyed by the fire of 1928. In the seventies and eighties it was Fall River's leading hotel.

From 1850 to 1880, a number of small hotels operated, for short periods on Bedford Street. Some carried most imposing advertisements in the newspapers; the largest and most impressive being Perry Davis' Oyster House. Mr. Davis was later known to the world as the originator of his famous "Pain Killer".

Many eating and lodging quarters were established in the old Richardson House on Main and Central Streets.

The most famous and perhaps the most infamous of the outlying hostels was the Union House at the "Narrows". Opened in 1864, it was said to be evening headquarters for the returning Union veterans. It had a varied career, under many proprietors. The name was changed to "The Waptupa" in 1882. Thirty-two years of continued operation, at the eastern entrance to the city made it well known.

The Hotel Mellen built by the Border City Hotel Company, with George F. Mellen as president and chief promoter, was opened October 18, 1888, by a grand reception, at which over six hundred of Fall River's social citizenry were present.

The company was capitalized at \$150,000.00. Mr. Mellen did not manage the hotel himself. The first lessees were the Bowker Brothers and George W. Bowker was the manager. Through fifty odd years there has been a procession of owners and managers, until Eugene J. Pontiff acquired control in 1936.⁶ For years the chief competitors of "The Mellen" were "The Wilbur" and "The Mohican", both destroyed in the fire of 1928.

⁶ A fire gutted the Hotel Mellen, Sept. 27, 1943. It has been rebuilt by Mr. Pontiff and now has a capacity of one hundred and forty guests in comparison with fifty-four when opened. "The Mellen" is now (1946) our leading hotel.

