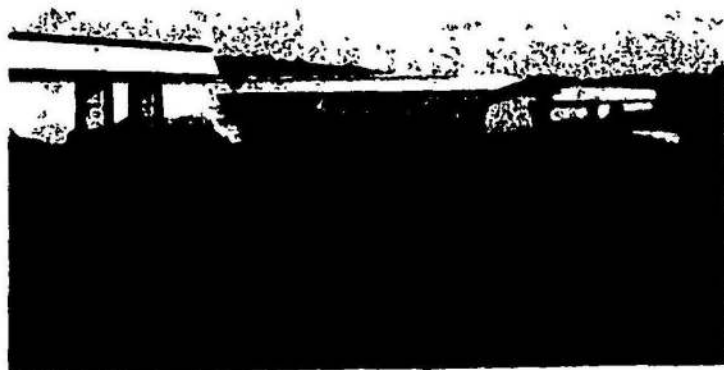


Great Road (Route 119) A Major Highway For 3 Centuries



PART OF THE NEW Beaver Brook Industrial Park on Great Road which is the incarnation of lands which had been farmed for 250 years. (Photo by G. B. Seavey)

by Gordon B. Seavey

LITTLETON — The major transportation link from Boston through Concord to Southern New Hampshire was rightly called the Great Road. In Colonial days it wound its dusty way, or in winter or rainy weather, its muddy way from town to town connecting farmers and craftsmen in the north to the port of Boston.

It passed through farmlands already established by the early courageous settlers, avoiding swamplands, rock outcroppings, steep grades and hazardous terrain as much as possible.

Horse-drawn vehicles and lumbering ox carts carried farm crops and wood to fast-growing Boston. Sometimes they would be part of a convoy of as many as 75 or a 100 vehicles, or perhaps a solitary man or boy on horseback from the back country with a light load of farm produce. Taverns, spaced conveniently along the way, took care of the weary and hungry traveler as well as providing fodder and shelter for the animals.

Twenty-five miles a day was about the usual speed; later, the stagecoach usually drawn by four horses which were often changed, made better progress.

A postcard produced by Mrs. Margaret Thatcher Drury from her thick historical files show how Great Road looked 75 years ago. It was narrow, almost a lane lined with two stonewalls, as shown above. The cluster of telephone lines now have been consolidated into single cables. No electric wires are shown as this power had not been introduced to the area until 1890. The road was unpaved. This photo was taken in front of the Proctor homestead, the third farm in town. Katherine Proctor, then a little girl, is standing in front of her home. She is the 9th generation member of the family to live in the house, circa 1868.

In the middle right of the postcard is shown the set of buildings which comprised the town farm, built in 1828 and



THE GREAT ROAD, as it passed through Littleton 75 years ago, is now busy Route 119 leading to New Hampshire. Town farm buildings are on the right. Photo is from an old postcard.

finally abandoned by the town in 1919. The photographer stood in front of the residence, which still stands, and is occupied by the Theodore Eliades family, to make the photo of the Beaver Brook Industrial Park.

Once farmed for more than 250 years, the area now has three buildings which have been completed and occupied during the past year. This leaves room for expansion on the 42-acre plot for a dozen such plants, designed for light industrial purposes.

Feeder roads to the Great Road were added as the need arose. Chelmsford, in 1819, voted "a highway of three rods wide laid out, beginning at a white oak tree marked at the

line between Littleton and Chelmsford, running as the path now is by marked trees...until it comes to the highway which is laid to the meadow of Arthur Crouch, deceased."

Today, the Great Road winds over hill and dale, rides the top of the eskers at Groton Ridges, but it is now known to most as busy Route 119. Still only a tortuous double lane highway, it is overburdened with automotive traffic which is slowed considerably during the morning and evening rush hours.

Nevertheless, it is considered one of the Commonwealth's most scenic routes, a "must" for Sunday drivers but a horror to commuters.