

Automobiles were rare and most folks stayed close to home

BY JUNE KENNEDY
CORRESPONDENT

The following travel tales include 14 interviews conducted in 1974-75 by June W. Kennedy.

Emma M. Day
(1842-1920)

Diary, June 1869 — "Over to Mrs. Cummings yesterday to see how they did for [their] horse threw them out of the wagon over to Graniteville he got frightened by a dog — he ran home very fast a young man tried to stop him and got hurt a good deal, but they did not get any bones broke. S. and Ada could not go to Lowell for W. wanted the horse."

Allister Macdougall
(1891-1989)

"About two or three times a year we took a trip to Lowell in the carriage. We'd put the 'hoss' in a stable on Church Street. For children it was quite a treat, especially during the Christmas season with the windows decorated with all the toys. We'd return nine, ten or eleven o'clock over the road to Westford. I always remember it was when we hit Princeton Boulevard that we'd hear the first clank of hoof of our trotting horse. Till we reached that point in our journey, all the roads were dirt."

Otis Day
(1891-1994)

"First car I saw came up Boston Road, went around the Common and down Hildreth Street. I was at Sunday School [Congregational Church], settin' out on the doorstep. There were two men in an open car — no roof — a stubby little thing — darndest lookin' contraption.

"In 1920, Dad got a Model-T Ford. All you had to do was drive 25 miles, send in somethin' to tell 'em and they'd send you a license. That's all there was to it."

May E. Day (1890-1973)

Diary, July 1905: "Uncle Arthur carried Alice Etta down here on his wheel. Uncle Arthur went to Lowell in the afternoon on his automobile."

Diary, July 1905: "While I was at Aunt Margaret's they nearly had an accident. Uncle Arthur came up to get his camera and Edith Normington was with him. While he was in the house she happened to hit the thing that

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started it. Aunt Margaret had been talking with her. She had hold of the automobile and run along beside it. It struck the apple tree side of the house. She jumped as it struck. It bent the dashboard and broke some of the front but he could use it."

Diary, July 1905: "I walked up [town] because the hind tire wouldn't pump up good."

Diary, January 1906: "Addie and Grandma went to Graniteville [Church] because the horse couldn't go up the hill."

Diary, January 1906: "The wagon wheel run over Uncle Arthur's foot going up the hill and hurt it quite badly."

Diary, August 1906: "Pleasant. Otis and I went to Concord Reformatory with Uncle A. and Cora in the auto. Started 9:10. Got there 5 min. of 10. Ten miles. I wore Aunt M. auto glasses. It commenced 10:30. 823 prisoners. The guard room was all ironed. We passed by the cells on a walk way above the floor. The men were reading. The rooms weren't any bigger than our sink room. A bed, chair, wash-

stand. Gave us front seat. The prisoners marched in lockstep — 16 in a seat. The choir was made up of prisoners. The officers had seats along the side. Some of the prisoners had strips on their arms for good behavior. Thirty-one in red. They were the worst ones. After service people went out before prisoners. Some hadn't been to church. Saw them marching in their cells and heard the noise locking them. Saw some of their work in the guard room. Uncle A. watered his auto. Went back same way we came."

Diary, Sept. 1906: "The horse acted out. Tore my drawers on wagon shaft."

Diary, Sept. 1906: "Studied till Meeting time. Horse sick so walked."

Vivian Sargent Smith
(1906-1990)

"Although I do not remember it, my first automobile ride was the year of my birth, 1906. I rode from the hospital in my grandparents new car and came to live in Graniteville across from the Mill Pond. It was a slow ride for Grandmother was terrified of speed — speed probably being about 15 miles an hour. The auto had side baskets; the door opened in the back. As I grew older and wanted to sit in back, there was a rope to prevent me from falling out. I remember the cars had side curtains made of some kind of isinglass that you'd put on when it rained. I think people wore dusters in those days because I have found a few in the attic. Dusters were long linen coats that even the men wore to protect their clothing before the days of paved roads. I've seen pictures of my mother with a large hat and veil worn for protection against the wind and that great

speed, I suppose. It was a great feat and an event to ride up Westford Hill. I never knew anybody or played with any children in Westford Center until I was in my teens."

Robert Spinner
(1901-1992)

"I remember when there were just a handful of automobiles in town — John C. Abbott, Mr. Cameron, Mr. Sargent and just a few others. They ran only in summer; they were jacked up for the winter — no antifreeze and no plowing. My mother would dress me up to see the wooden roller which was as wide as our road and pulled by four horses. It packed the snow for the sleighs."

Tom Curley
(1894-1981)

"The snow roller rolled the road down hard. Long as it was cold, it was okay. With a warm spell, a horse would break through the crust to his knees. They only used the rollers a few years because of this."

Mabel Prescott (1898 - 1993)

"I didn't get to go anywhere till I had the car. I didn't travel around like the kids do today. They don't appreciate it either. I remember the sidewalk plow. It was V-shaped. Peter Clement ran it. I'd hang on to the hind end and have a ride."

Westford Wardsman
newspaper (1909)

"The selectmen have posted notices warning against a dangerous speed of automobiles. It is hoped now that farmers and horses and lumber wagon travel generally will not have time to steer about as in the old-fashioned days of 'Gee and haw.'"

Westford Wardsman
newspaper (1910)

"W.J. Merritt has a new automobile. It is an E-M-F touring car of 30 horsepower."

Frank Jarvis
(1906-1998)

"Never got into the center of town a great deal as a youngster — from Parker Village. Autos were almost nil — considered wealthy if you had one. It was a thrill, as a child, even riding in one — back in 1913, '14, '15. If you went to Hampton Beach you were a well-traveled man."

Bernard Wilder
(1915 - 1994)

"Mother was quite a horsewoman and could ride sidesaddle. I remember she'd take us boys, Arnold, George and me, in the sleigh to the Congregational Church — used the horsesheds to the rear. Also, she'd take us to the barbershop in Chelmsford — down Vose Road [then Old Lowell Road] and over to Acton Road. It was 25 cents a cut and done with dull clippers. Big time!"

Elizabeth Bosworth Field
(1916 - 1996)

"The day the oil trucks paved Main Street we walked on it in our bare feet and got spanked. I can still see the horse teams and sleds going up and down the hill with wood. When we were coasting, we'd hook onto the pungs and ride back up the hill. Beautiful sledding and we didn't have any traffic."

Walter Fletcher
(1898 - 1975)

"The roads were scraped by 'hosses' every spring — a pair of 'hosses' for grading. There were big steel drags; the men stood on them. On Plain Road the ruts were

so deep you didn't even have to keep your hands on the truck to steer. You were in that rut and you weren't going anywhere. Only Depot to the Center was oiled."

Grace Fletcher (1900 - 1979)

"Our first car was a seven passenger Buick. Mrs. Miller, the blacksmith's wife, went with me on my trip to Concord to get my driver's license. I remember I stalled on Providence Hill. There were no gas stations in those days, just little sheds for gas along the way."

Carl Hornbrook
(born about 1910)

"In 1925 we had a Model-T. In winter we'd put skis on the front axle and tread on the back — a year-round buggy. We also had carriages and buggys with rubber tires front and back — fancy wrought iron with fringe on top. Even had a sleigh with the fringe on top, with shaft for one horse."

Clyde Prescott (1892 - 1977)

"I'm a homeboy! Never had a car or been behind a wheel. Oh, I went to Rye and Hampton Beach a few times and spent a couple of hours in Portland another time. In 1966 I thought it was about time this old fella' saw something of the world so I joined 44 other Grangers from Massachusetts and New York and travelled to Alaska. Had a grand time."

Lucinda Prescott (1888 - 1976)

"Was born here at the Farm (Chamberlain Corner) in 1888 and wouldn't know Nabnasset, Parker Village, Graniteville or Forge Village. Would get lost. Wouldn't know anywheres where it is."

— This is fourteenth article in the ongoing Westford Recollections Millennium series.