

Early roads paved with strange sights

By June W. Kennedy

A good many things have changed in this town over the past 100 years, but surely one of the most amazing happenings, at least from the point of view of old-timers, is the coming of the automobile. In this second of a two-part series on the advent of the horseless carriage, diaries and recollections of those who were on hand to experience this phenomenon are offered up.

Robert Spinner: "I remember when there were just a handful of automobiles in town — John C. Abbot, 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: "The snow rol-

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ler 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."



Photo courtesy of June W. Kennedy

By 1929, the benefits of the motor car were well-known to Westford, as seen in this photo of residents enjoying the town bicentennial pageant from their autos at the foot of Prospect Hill.

Mabel Prescott: "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."

From the *Westford Wardsman* newspaper, 1909: "The selectmen have posted notices

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Roads at turn-of-century



Photo courtesy of June W. Kennedy

Benjamin F. Day, town road superintendent in the late 1800s, stands with his crew and the road scraping team. Walter Fletcher once recalled the early days of this century: "Every spring the roads were scraped and graded with 'hosses'. 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 else."

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warning against a dangerous speed of automobiles. It is hoped now that farmers and horses and lumber wagon travel generally will now have time to steer about as in the old-fashioned days of "Gee and haw."

From the *Westford Wardsman*, 1910: "W.J. Merritt has a new automobile. It is an E-M-F touring car of 30 horsepower."

Frank Jarvis: "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: "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 horse sheds 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¢ a cut and done with dull clippers. Big time!"

Elizabeth Bosworth Field: "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: "The roads were scraped by horses every spring, a pair of horses 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: "Our first car was a 7-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: "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: "I'm a home-boy! 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 traveled to Alaska. Had a grand time!"

Lucinda Prescott: "Was born here at the farm [Chamberlin Corners] in 1888 and wouldn't know Nabnasset, Parker Village, Graniteville or Forge Valley. Would get lost. Wouldn't know anywhere where it is."

June W. Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.