

Teamsters traveled long trail to Boston

By June W. Kennedy

Elizabeth Carver McKay told the story of her great-grandfather, William Kittredge, who walked from Goffstown, N.H., with a stick over his shoulder, carrying his worldly possessions.



TEAMSTER AMOS Leighton lost his life at 40 after being crushed by his panicked horse.

(Courtesy June W. Kennedy)

When he'd saved enough money from his \$8 a month job at the Wright Farm in Brookside, he bought the home next to the Abbot Middle School known as the Old Homestead Orchards, cleared the land on the hillside and planted apple trees from pomace or seed, as he could not afford the stock.

As the trees grew, he grafted them. Seven or eight years later when his first crop came in, he hauled them to Faneuil Hall Market with a wagon and team of oxen. He could

not afford horses.

No doubt it was en route to Boston that he met and married Mary Tilton of Brighton. It was she who taught William Kittredge to read and write.

"There was one man who hauled his load into Boston with a pair of donkeys," recalled the late Ben Prescott in an interview some years ago. "That's not like the stories I generally hear about donkeys, but he had them pretty well trained."

On two or three occasions Otis Day accompanied his 16-year-old neighbor, Alson Kimball, on the journey to Boston. "I was only about a dozen, myself," he recalled.

"We went through Carlisle. At about 8 or 9 o'clock we picked up a load in Bedford. It was getting on to midnight when we arrived in Lexington. We pulled up to rest and feed the horses for about a half hour or so.

"In back of the railroad station was an all-night bakery. All went in and bought a lemon pie. I never saw a lemon pie before in my life! He put it in the wagon for the next day.

"Putting the bridle on the horse, we headed into town. Under the wagon the lantern was hanging by a strap. Every time the team moved, the lantern swayed. From where I was sitting, it looked like the horses legs were going sideways.

"There were very few street lights. We approached Somerville about 4 a.m. The smell of hogs was strong at Squire's slaughterhouse!

"Upon entering the market, we contacted the city commission men where our goods were consigned. After putting the horses up in a stable on Cross Street where they could get feed, we breakfasted at Haymarket Square. All had told me about this place where you could get baked beans with ketchup. I'd never had ketchup before either. Boy, was it good!

"After collecting 25 or 30¢ for cartage, we got the team and left. In the afternoon on the way home, we cut up the lemon pie and ate it. Boy, I thought that was pretty good."

Although it was customary to arrive back in Westford in late afternoon, the late May E. Day recorded in her diary on Tuesday, Aug. 14, 1906: "Otis went to Boston tonight with Alson." And again on Thursday, Aug. 15, 1906: "Otis didn't get home till 11:15 p.m. Hadn't slept since he left home. Got up when we were half through breakfast."

It must have been quite a trip for a young boy.

Tragic teamster tale

Not all teamster tales had happy endings. It was about noon on July 26, 1905, when Amos R. Leighton was returning from the Boston market with horse and team. The night before, he had loaded his wagon with local produce, mostly berries, and headed for the city, 30 miles away and a good nine hour drive. Some of the produce was his

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'I used to go in alone. But then two of us went together in case the one driving fell asleep. You got fined \$5 for falling asleep on a horse-drawn cart because the horse would walk into something or kill somebody.'

George Perkins
teamster

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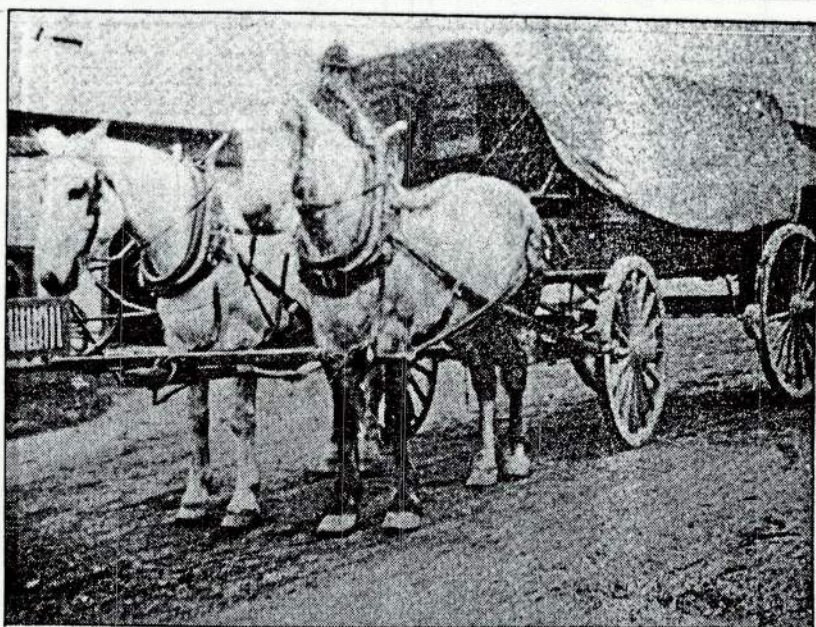
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own, as he operated a berry farm in conjunction with his homestead across from the town hall. Other produce on his wagon was from neighboring farmers.

Stopping at the half-way mark, East Lexington, on the return trip for rest, lunch and to feed the horse, he had removed the animal's bridle. Here is where he made a fatal mistake. After slipping the feed bag over the animal's head, he sat in front of the beast to keep it quiet. Apparently a brisk breeze whipped the tarpaulin on the back of the wagon toward the animal.

According to the *Lexington Minute-man* newspaper of that week: "The frightened animal started off on a run. Mr. Leighton grabbed at the harness and tried to check the horse's flight when, in some way, the reins got tangled up in the horse's feet and he fell down rolling on top of the man. The animal struggled to his feet and in doing so trampled on the prostrate man, who had probably been rendered unconscious by the fall."

The account goes on to say that: "The horse struck at the man in such a way that the right leg was broken and there was a terrible fracture at the base of the skull which had caused instant death." Leighton was only 40 years old at the time.

"I used to go in alone," said the late George Perkins when interviewed several years ago.



PUNCH AND JUDY are hitched and ready to haul a load of apples from Westford to Faneuil Hall marketplace in this photo dating back to the first decade of the century. Teamsters routinely left town about dusk, then traveled through Carlisle, Lexington and Somerville or via Acton, Lincoln and Brighton, reaching Boston by daybreak. (Photo courtesy of June Kennedy)

"But then two of us went together in case the one driving fell asleep. You got fined \$5 for falling asleep on a horse-drawn cart because the horse would walk into something or kill somebody.

"When we'd get into East Cambridge, oftentimes some fellows would take a knife and rip the canvasses and then they'd take out a whole box of apples. One time I climbed up on top of the apples with a 20' long birch stick. All of a sudden, I seen five or six fellows comin' out. I waited till they got right to the back and I come down on their heads with that stick, you know. Boy, laid 'em right out cold on the street and we kept going. They didn't know what hit 'em.

"The wagons had to be unloaded by 5 a.m. at these wholesale markets. You had to get your horses out before the traffic of the city opened. Within two years after Pearly Wright introduced the motorized truck for transporting, the wagon and team became outdated," continued George Perkins.

"I can remember when they first came in with trucks. They had governors on them; all they'd go is 20 m.p.h. You couldn't go any faster no matter how fast you wanted to go."

Marvelous Macintosh

About 1912 to 1914, the Macintosh apple came into existence. This was the craze or bonanza, that the Macintosh apple

would make your farm. Acres and acres of Macintosh were planted in town.

Gradually the women and the children didn't seem to want to pick anymore. The heyday of an active berry industry was over.

It might be interesting to know that the history of the spraying of apples really goes back to the coming of the Macintosh and the disappearance of small fruit farms in Westford.

Until 1910 or 1912, no one bothered spraying their trees. The apples grown were the kind that could be grown without scab and seemed immune to insects: Red Astrachan in early summer, Gravenstein in fall, and the Baldwin in winter. The Macintosh was susceptible to scab, codling, moth and railroad worm.

Around 1900 it was the rare grower who sprayed at all, and still the old Baldwin was good enough to be packed and shipped by the hundreds of barrels from Westford to England. As late as 1930 good crops were produced by as little as three or four sprays. But the more one sprays, the more one has to spray, with the result that 15 or 18 are applied today, thus eliminating many of the family or small orchards.

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

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