Transportation in Bridgewater, 1900-1910

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Bridgewater, Massachusetts
A Town in Transition

Transportation
1900-1910
(Including Extensive Historical Background)

Dr. Benjamin A. Spence
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An Explanation

For several years I have had the pleasure of delving into the history of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, concentrating on the first quarter of the twentieth century and providing, when appropriate, historical background to make my discussions clearer. Although my research and writing are ongoing, I have decided to make available drafts of a number of topics which I have explored at length, with the hope that the material presented will prove helpful to many readers. I would request that credit be given if my findings are used by other writers or those making oral presentations.

As my study has proceeded, many people have been helpful and, hopefully, I will be able to thank all of them during the course of my writing. At this point, let me mention just a few who have been especially supportive. Many thanks to the Trustees of Bridgewater’s Public Library for allowing me free access to the sources in the town’s library, made easier by the aid given to me by the research librarians under the competent direction of Mary O’Connell. Without the constant aid of Dr. Steven G. Young, I would have been at a loss many times in how to proceed in the use of the computer. Many thanks to Sylvia B. Larson who has been willing to spend numerous hours using her fine editing skills and her probing historical mind to improve greatly these drafts, all the while sharing my great interest in the history of Bridgewater. Any errors in these pieces, of course, are solely mine. What a great joy it is to share many of my findings with S. Mabell Bates, who, as a friend, head of the special collection at Bridgewater State College Library, and member of the Bridgewater Historical Commission, has provided me with valuable historical material and has been a constant source of inspiration. Lastly, my research, particularly concerning the Bridgewater Normal School, would have been far less interesting without my many conversations with David K. Wilson, long associated with public relations and institutional research at Bridgewater State College. I appreciate his willingness to share his historical knowledge of the college, videotape my tours of Bridgewater’s School Street and Central Square, begin the time-consuming task of placing some of my writings on a web-site, and advise me on putting my essays into more permanent forms.

In preparing this essay on transportation, I owe a special debt of gratitude to James Mike Bois, George B. Rizer and David R. Moore, all citizens of Bridgewater who contributed in different ways to a collection of historical pictures of the town. Bois, one of the Bridgewater Historical Collectors, diligently collected over 450 scenes of Bridgewater, many of which were included in the two pictorial histories, 1987 and 1994, prepared by the Collectors. Equally important was the contribution of Rizer, a professional photographer for the Boston Globe.
whose artistic skill reproduced all the pictures in these two works, “bringing to life some that were faded or in some way defective.” Thanks to the skillful and time-consuming work of David R. Moore, Chairman of Bridgewater’s Historical Commission, over 500 historical pictures, including many found in the two earlier works, have now been digitized and placed on one computer disc, labeled the Rizer Collection, creating an historical treasure easily accessible to those interested in the town’s rich heritage. I will continue to include pictures from this collection in future essays.

In addition to making use of the Rizer Collection, readers will note that three other features are more prominent in this essay on transportation, the fifth, so far, in my ongoing study: Bridgewater, Massachusetts: A Town in Transition.* Footnotes frequently cite one of my first four studies, allowing readers and, indeed, myself to cross reference relevant material. I have also included more subject matter references, perhaps violating at times the dictum that if historical facts are not important enough to include in the text, they should not be in a footnote. Since I have done a great deal of research on a variety of topics dealing with Bridgewater’s history, I have on occasion informed my readers of my intentions to write about some of them in the future. Only time will tell if my ambitions outreach my grasp.

One final note concerning bibliography: At some juncture, I will present an essay on the sources used in my study. For now, the numerous footnotes will give the reader a good idea of the research materials used in this historical account of the Town of Bridgewater.

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* My works on education, churches, stores and services, manufacturing, and transportation in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, concentrate on the years between 1900 and 1910, but also, when appropriate, include extensive historical background. Copies of these studies can be found in the Bridgewater Public Library, the Maxwell Library of Bridgewater State College, the Memorial Building of the Old Bridgewater Historical Society in West Bridgewater, and the library of the Old Colony Historical Society in Taunton, Massachusetts.
During the first decade of the twentieth century, the inhabitants of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, numbering 6 to 8 thousand, if the population of the State Farm is included, were not isolated from one another or others in small and large communities across the state and nation. Blessed with several modes of transportation, Bridgewater in the early 1900’s had far more contact with the outside world than had been the case during the two hundred years following the incorporation of the original town in 1656. Horses, railroads, electric trolleys, automobiles, and bicycles all contributed in varying degrees to a configuration of transportation that allowed the town’s inhabitants and businesses more associations within and without Bridgewater’s twenty-eight square miles. One note of caution, however. With the benefits of railroads and trolleys not equally spread across the town, horse ownership limited, and only about twenty automobile owners in 1907, walking was undoubtedly a more usual way of getting around than would be the case a century later. Undoubtedly good exercise, traveling by foot on hot summer and blustery winter days to the village center from outlying districts of Bridgewater, such as the easterly ones of Prattown and Darlington, was not always a pleasant experience.\(^1\)

**Horses (to 1900)**

While we can only touch upon the subject, horses by 1900 had been part of Bridgewater’s life for well over two centuries, including their contribution in meeting the town’s transportation needs. Horses imported in the early days of New England settlements were mostly of a “nondescript” type. They were mentioned in Bridgewater’s historical records by 1670, about thirty years after wills in the Plymouth Colony began to list them as part of an estate’s inventory. Bridgewater’s horses, branded with a large “B” “on the near shoulder,” were soon an essential part of the town’s transportation system, evidenced by the building and maintenance of “horse bridges,” wide enough in some cases to accommodate a cart.

Perhaps in recognition of the horses’ important role in land transportation at that time was the fact that canoes, “made of whole pine trunks” and used by households along that part of the Town River in what is now West Bridgewater, were labeled “water-horses.” In the 1670’s, horses were also used by the Bridgewater men who took part in the so-called King Philip’s War, the most devastating conflict in the New England colonies between the white settlers and native Americans. At the onset of the conflict on June 21, 1675, for example, seventeen of the town’s young men, “well-armed and furnished with horses,” marched south to the small settlement of Metapoiset “to strengthen the garrison at that place.” Since church services and town meetings before 1716 and 1822, respectively, were held exclusively in the western and original settlement of the old Bridgewater, horses were especially important as a means for transportation to the inhabitants of the newer eastern, southern, and northern parts of the town, as they sought to fulfill their civic and religious obligations.

It would be difficult to overstate the prominence of horse-related transportation in what became the South Parish of the original Bridgewater in 1716, an assertion not posited upon the existence of any extensive narrative or analysis either in primary or secondary sources, but upon the numerous occurrences of the word “horse” in the historical records of the eighteenth century. During the hundred years or so before the South Parish became the present-day Bridgewater in the early 1820’s, horses, sometimes with an attached cart or buggy, provided a main way of getting goods and people around. Agriculture, which dominated the South Parish’s economy in the 1700’s, was mostly of a subsistence nature at first. But it soon took on some commercial aspects as farmers began to use horses to carry a portion of agricultural

2 Joshua E. Crane, “History of Bridgewater,” Hurd’s History of Plymouth County (Philadelphia: The J. W. Lewis & Co., 1884), p. 774; I sometimes used a reprint of Crane’s history done by The Bridgewater Historical Collectors, 1986, ed. by James William Buckley and Katherine Pratt Jordan; hereafter, this latter work will be cited as Crane; The Bridgewater Book Illustrated (Taunton, Massachusetts: William S. Sullwold Publishing, Inc., 1985; published by the Old Bridgewater Historical Society, this work includes material from two books published in 1899 and 1908 and some additional information and pictures that take us to around 1916; for most of the future citations of this source it will not be possible to give pages, and they will be cited as Bridgewater Book; Nahum Mitchell, History of the Early Settlement of Bridgewater in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, Including An Extensive Family Register (Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc., 1975), pp. 37-39, 66, 68, 69, 71, 76; this work has been reprinted several times since it was first published in 1840; the edition cited here was reprinted under the sponsorship of A. Evelyn Nourse; George A. Langdon, Jr., Pilgrim Colony: A History of New Plymouth-1620-1691 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 143, 146-147; it might be noted that Plymouth colony by 1680 was shipping “horses to Boston where they were re-exported to the West Indies;” Doris Johnson Melville, Major Bradford’s Town: A History of Kingston 1726-1976 (Produced for the Town of Kingston by its 250th Anniversary Committee, 1976), p. 27; Samuel Eliot Morison, The Oxford History of the American People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 70, 73, 471; The “Highlights” Staff, “Transportation,” History Highlights: Bridgewater, Massachusetts: Commemorative Journal, ed. by Katherine M. Doherty (Taunton, Massachusetts: Published for the Bicentennial Commission by William S. Sullwold, Publishing, 1976), p. 177; this source will hereafter be cited as HH.
output to nearby markets. Those farmers living close to the First Parish Church, located on what is now School Street, could easily walk to Sunday morning services, while others in the parish, which contained around 1,000 people in the 1760’s, had to rely on horses to reach their destination, hopefully finding a convenient spot to “park” their horse-drawn conveyances and be sitting in their pews on time. Horse transportation had its limits, however. In 1743, for instance, the southwestern section of the parish joined with a part of Middleboro to form the Titicut Parish in part because of the considerable distance to the church in Bridgewater. Inhabitants of the South Parish also relied on horses to attend town meetings, held in the western part of the original Bridgewater. Horses contributed to the educational system by making it possible for grammar school masters to hold classes in the four parishes on a rotating basis. In 1773, Joseph Snell spent thirteen weeks in the South Parish and twelve weeks in the East Parish. As in King Philip’s War in the 1670’s, horses figured a century later in Bridgewater’s contribution to the winning of American independence. In 1781, the town voted to “defray the charges for horses raised in the town for the army, in silver at six shillings per dollar.”

In the early 1820’s, the four parishes of what was to be known as the Old Bridgewater decided to go their separate ways by forming distinct towns. The South Parish, to the chagrin of the other parishes, chose not to re-incorporate, but simple retained the “ancient” name of the original town and its founding date of 1656. Not enough has been written about the role of horses in providing transportation in the “new” and much smaller Bridgewater of the 1800’s, an assertion that could apply to many other American communities of this period. Perhaps this mode of transportation has been taken for granted by historians, who have devoted much more attention to canals, railroads, trolleys, and the early years of the automobiles. Horses, nevertheless, were involved in almost every aspect of Bridgewater life in the nineteenth century.

Beginning around 1806, horse-drawn passenger and mail coaches, making use of the newly-built Boston and New Bedford Turnpike, traversed on what are now Broad and Bedford Streets in Bridgewater.

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3 Crane, pp. 800, 814; Bridgewater Book, p. 20; Robert D. MacCurdy, “Bridgewater Goes to School,” HH, p. 101; Mitchell, History of Bridgewater, pp. 58-59; Anne Norton Greene, Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America (Cambridge, Massachusetts * London, England: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 189; Greene makes the point that until the “invention and availability of mechanical agricultural implements in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, most farm work was performed by humans using hand labor and few horses.”

4 Bridgewater Book, p. 22; See Samuel Eliot Morison’s slim volume, One Boy’s Boston, 1962, for a delightful discussion of how horses shaped the life of Boston in the late nineteenth century; Greene, Horses at Work, p. 284;
A hostelry, later known as the Bridgewater Inn, was placed in 1827 on the northeastern corner of the emerging Central Square, soon becoming a popular and convenient place for lodging passengers and changing horses. Long after rail service came to Bridgewater in the 1840’s, horses continued to be used for transportation as the town’s population went from about 1,800 in 1830 to close to 6,000 in 1900. In 1856, many of the town’s 229 horses, valued at $16,472, were used for traveling to the village center to shop, attend church services (by 1900 six of Bridgewater’s eight churches were in or near Central Square), or enjoy some social event, often church-related. The records of the First Parish Church clearly indicate that horse sheds in the 1800’s were important to some of the parishioners. Surely many communicants, most of them Irish, of St. Thomas Aquinas Church in the late nineteenth century had fond memories of their pastor, Reverend William E. Kelly, “riding his horse Kitty, his muffler flowing in the wind, as he rode” to visit their homes. 5

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, horses continued to do their part in providing for the transportation needs of Bridgewater. Some manufacturing firms, including the Bridgewater Iron Company, Bates & Hyde Gin Works, and Perkins foundry, while relying more and more on the Old Colony Railroad, still made use of horses during Bridgewater’s transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Smaller industrial enterprises employed horse-drawn wagons to deliver manufactured products to local customers. Perhaps some folks in January 1886 watched “F. D. King’s four horse team” as it left town to deliver three tack machines made by the Perkins machine shop to a company in nearby Kingston. Horses were used extensively by retailers and service providers, as is

5 Crane, p. 818; “An accounting of its history as revealed by its records,” The First Parish Unitarian Church, Bridgewater, Massachusetts, Written, Compiled and Edited By Dorothy L. Mann and Anne H. Bates (Bridgewater, Massachusetts; Published by Bridgewater-Raynham Graphic Arts Department, 1976), p. 145; BI, April 24, 1886, July 30, 1887, July 23, 1897; Celebration of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Incorporation of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, at West Bridgewater, June 3, 1856 (Boston: Printed by John Wilson and Son, 1856), p. 163; Census of Massachusetts, 1905, p. 819; Carolyn A. Kelley, Project Director, “Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish-150 Years of Faith,” Memorial Booklet-150th Anniversary of Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish-Bridgewater, Massachusetts-1848-1998, p. 16; HH, pp. 141, 177, 223, 225; Pictorial History of Bridgewater, Massachusetts (Bridgewater: Dorr’s Print Shop, Whitman: Harry B. Harding and Sons Printers, 1987), p. 7; Ruth Hooper Bishop, James “Mike” Bois, James W. Buckley, Martha Dorr Cossaboom, Katherine Pratt Jordan, Arthur C. Lord, Dorothy Lord Mann, and James K. Moore were the Historical Collectors who prepared this book and three other publications; General Sylvanus Lazell of the East Parish of the original Bridgewater was very influential in the building of the Boston and New Bedford Turnpike; by the mid-1840’s a stage line ran from Bridgewater to Taunton, where passengers could catch the railroad to Boston, New Bedford, and Providence, Rhode island; Leach Bros. were the proprietors of the Taunton and Bridgewater stage line, attracting “considerable attention” when it first employed a “tally-ho coach” in late July of 1887; see pp. 31-32 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910.
Horses began to be used in the 1880's to pull fire apparatus.
(Rizer Collection)
shown by perusing pictorial histories cited in this essay. Whether it was for meat from Simmons’s market in Central Square, coal from Keith’s yard on Spring Street, or a package from Bowman’s express company, Bridgewater inhabitants could rely on horse-drawn carts. On a more somber note, Prophett’s funeral service used stately black horses to draw hearses to the town’s cemeteries, including those on Mount Prospect and Center Streets. In the 1880’s, the privately-run Fire District began to employ horses, “usually secured from the stable of F. D. King,” to transport men and apparatus to the scene of a fire. By the 1890’s, the Town of Bridgewater, while still using privately-owned horses when needed, began to purchase its own to meet the transportation requirements of public service departments, including those dealing with fire, law and order, and street construction and maintenance. For instance, in 1899, five years after the fire-fighting service became a public responsibility, the town began to rely on its own horses, housed in a stable behind the fire house on School Street. William S. Prophett, the first Chief of the town’s Fire Department, had been given “a team for his own use” five years earlier, but had used horses from King’s stable. (When motor-driven apparatus were first used to fight town fires in 1915, the Bridgewater Independent, in a long article announcing this innovation, said nothing about the yeoman work done by horses for so many years in transporting volunteer firefighters to the scenes of small and large fires.) During much of the nineteenth century, the town constable also relied on a horse to carry out a particular assignment, but had to use his own or one borrowed from a neighbor since the town at the time did not cover this cost.6

Horses (1900 to 1910)

If steam trains, electric trolleys, and motor vehicles increasingly dominated transportation in the early 1900’s, horses, as they had done for over two centuries, continued to play a significant, albeit

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6 BI, Jan. 30, 1886, March 17, Oct. 12, Nov. 16, 1889, May 12, 1894, July 23, 1897, March 3, Oct. 27, 1899, July 2, 1915, Feb. 22, 1924; “Twenty Years Ago,” BI, Dec. 27, 1907; for more on the role of horses in the town’s commercial enterprises see pages 8, 18, 26, 34-36 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; I might mention the fact that horses get no mention in the brief history of the Fire Department found on pages 58-59 of History Highlights; David R. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater (Charleston, S. C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), p. 111; this source includes two excellent photographs which clearly show the importance of horses in pulling fire apparatus in the late 1800’s; since there were no coal dealers in Bridgewater before the 1870’s, horses were used to haul it over the road from Taunton, Massachusetts; Herbert K. Pratt, “The First One Hundred Years,” no pagination; this last source is a brief unpublished account of Bridgewater’s “fire department” during its first century and is found in the files of the Bridgewater Public Library.
Northwestern Side of Central Square--Before the coming of the Trolleys in 1897
(Rizer Collection)
reduced, role in Bridgewater to an extent not appreciated by later generations. Unlike the rise in the town’s population from about 6,000 in 1900 to about 8,000 in 1910, the number of horses declined somewhat. But even at the end of the decade there were over four hundred in Bridgewater, only eighty-five less than in 1902 and far more than the count of eighty-one cited in the town’s annual report of 2002. It was not just a matter of statistics, however. In addition to serving as a mode of transportation for some citizens, farms and commercial and manufacturing enterprises, horses were an integral component of Bridgewater’s broad cultural and economic scene, as was the case in most communities, small and large, throughout Massachusetts and, indeed, the nation. Bridgewater inhabitants had grown accustomed to and comfortable with the contributions of horses to the daily doings of the town and, therefore, while taking advantage of the newer modes of transportation, undoubtedly experienced some poignant tinges of nostalgia as they witnessed some early indications that horses were destined to play only a minor part in the life of the community as the century proceeded.\(^7\)

From 1900 to 1910, horses, either town-owned or hired from a private stable, including the one run by E. N. Fisher in back of Churchill’s dry goods store on the western side of Central Square, continued to be employed by a number of town departments. Much of the work done by the Street Department, headed by Superintendent Robert J. McNeeland from 1900 to until his death in 1918, including the construction and repair of roads, bridges, and sidewalks and the removal of snow, would have not been possible without the power and transportation provided by horses. “The town horses certainly earned their salt during the snow storm,” the Independent approvingly noted on February 8, 1901. McNeeland’s annual reports always included an accounting of the expenses incurred by the use of these teams, taking note of the costs of blacksmithing and the maintenance of the drinking troughs on the Common and Summer, Pleasant, and Plymouth Streets. Despite some talk toward the end of the decade about using motorized apparatus, the Fire Department still relied on horses, with its Board of Engineers

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\(^7\) BI, Aug. 8, 1902; “Report of Assessors,” Annual Town Report, 1902, pp. 38-39; 1909, p. 30; 2002, p.123; annual town reports from 1900 to 1910 were printed by Arthur H. Willis, who in 1898 succeeded his mentor, Henry A. Pratt, in doing this yearly task; Census of the United States, 1910, Vol. I, p. 91; Louise Dickinson Rich, Innocence Under the Elms (Orleans, Massachusetts: Parnassus Imprints, 1983), pp. 118-121; first published in 1955, this last work is a must for anyone trying to understand life in Bridgewater in the early years of the twentieth century, keeping in mind that this account was written by an articulate woman who, along with her sister Alice, moved to Bridgewater in 1905, when their father James H. became the editor of the Bridgewater Independent; Greene, Horses at Work, appendix, p. 282; Greene’s citation of the United States censuses, 1840-1920, show a marked increase of horses until 1910, at which time they numbered around twenty-seven million; beginning in 1920 we begin to see this number decline; again see Morison’s reminiscences about his boyhood in late nineteenth Boston.
recommending in 1910 that the town purchased a pair of new ones. They were housed in the town barn behind the firehouse on School Street and were ready to join other horses in pulling the steamer, hook and ladder, and hose reels to fires threatening houses (frequently chimney-related), fields, forests and commercial and manufacturing establishments, including George O. Jenkins’s leatherboard mill in Prattown (August 1908) and Walter S. Little’s Eastern Grain Company along the railroad tracks off Plymouth Street (May 1910). Although Bridgewater did not formally create a police department, including the position of a police chief, until 1915, the town by the early 1900’s was covering the cost of using horses in some police actions. In the days before the widespread use of motorized vehicles, police officers relied on horses and wagons in their raids to stamp out illegal liquor operation, especially in the parts of Bridgewater some distance from Central Square. Under the jurisdiction of the three Overseers of the Poor, who also served as Selectmen and Assessors, the town poor farm on South Street was provided with a horse, an important transportation and labor resource for Neil J. Deering and his wife Annie G., who supervised this town facility from 1895 to 1913.⁸

Many Bridgewater businesses in the early 1900’s were dependent on horse-drawn conveyances to help meet their transportation needs. Manufacturing concerns, including Little’s Eastern Grain Company, Miller’s nail and tack shop, Jenkins’s leatherboard mill, and Stanley’s iron works relied on horses to deliver their products to customers in Bridgewater and surrounding communities. Most folks in town, however, perhaps took more notice of retailing and service enterprises, especially those in Central Square and on Broad Street, as they sought to increase their trade by providing the option of home delivery to their customers, some of whom who were now able to place their orders by telephone. For patrons who were shut-in, extra busy, a distance away, lacking horse transportation, or adverse to walking, the town’s leading groceries, including Alden’s, Leonard’s, and Simmons’s, had horse-drawn

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⁸ BI, March 30, 1895, Aug. 6, May 7, 1897, Feb. 8, May 24, Dec. 21, 1900, June 7, 1901, May 2, 1902, April 16, 1903, Jan. 22, March 11, 1904, Aug. 21, 1908, May 13, 20, 1910, July 12, 1912, Jan. 24, July 23, 1913, March 12, 1915, Feb. 7, 1919, Aug. 4, 1922, June 28, 1928; “Twenty Years Ago,” BI, Aug. 3, 1917; “Report of the Superintendent of Streets,” Annual Town Report, 1901, p. 85; 1905, pp. 54-55; 1908, p. 45; 1909, pp. 53-54; Dickinson Rich, Innocence Under the Elms, p.118; Pratt, “The First Hundred Years;” “Report of the Fire Department,” Annual Town Report, 1910, p. 40; 1911, p. 38; the town departments, mentioned above in relationship to their uses of horses, will be discussed fully in a separate essay at some point in my research and writing; Harry W. Swift was the first chief of the Police Department; in 1919, four years after the Fire Department began to use motorized apparatus, Joshua W. Gibbs, who had run a livery stable business behind the Bridgewater Inn after Francis D. King’s death in 1896, moved into the town stable off of School Street; it might be recalled that between 1865 and 1883, King’s business was on the western side of Central Square; this is where Fisher’s was located in the early 1900’s.
wagons, including meat carts, ready to deliver a variety of products. Those with a craving for sweets took note of the intention of the Bridgewater Bakery, located on Broad Street, to employ a daily horse-drawn delivery wagon and the decision of Casey’s store on the corner of Broad and Summer Streets in July of 1910 to expand its ice cream business by using “a wagon” [without the music, of course] to make “daily trips to all parts of the town.” Other commercial establishments, some of which might be classified as retailing-service enterprises, also met the needs of their clientele by using horse-drawn carts. Sumner Keith’s coal yard, Bridgewater’s oldest, and the Bridgewater Ice and Coal Company, started by Frederick A. McNeeland in 1909, just east of the railroad tracks on Plymouth Street, both delivered their products in this manner. An ice ad of McNeeland’s reminded folks to “Remember the Red Wagon,” which delivered ice three days a week. Wendell P. Hutchinson’s lumber yard on Spring Street promised “prompt delivery,” by using horses from his own stable. While the railroad and even the trolleys, beginning in 1906, delivered packages to Bridgewater, Joseph A. Bowman’s long-established express company, located in Central Square next to Cole’s Drug Store and the Adams Express Company, which started a branch on Hale Street in 1910, but soon moved to Broad Street and later to Perkins Street, could not have delivered packages from the railroad to the homes of local residents without wagons pulled by horses. Transferring items from the railroad car to the wagon was not without its problems, however, as a driver discovered on November 21, 1910, when “the horse became frightened and started for the stable in the centre of the town.” One would hope that the stately black horses used during this decade by the Prophett-Flynn funeral business to pull the hearse were more considerate.9

Town departments and commercial establishments were not alone in employing horses. Many were owned by town inhabitants who used them for transportation and recreation. A study showing the distribution of horses among the geographic areas and socio-economic classes of Bridgewater might tell us a great deal about the town in the early 1900’s. Some folks in the town’s outlying districts, especially those areas without rail or trolley transportation, were fortunate in having a horse and buggy to get them to Central Square and parts of Broad, Main, and Summer Streets. There they could, among other things,

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9 BI, Dec. 21, 1900, Aug. 15, Nov. 7, 1902, July 7, 1905, May 22, 1907, Jan. 10, 1908, March 4, May 10, June 24, July 15, Oct. 7, Nov. 25, 1910, Dec. 2, 1911; Crane p. 796; Lord, “First Quarter of the Century in Bridgewater,” Tales Around the Common, p. 45; Bridgewater Book; Pictorial History, 1994, pp. 21, 74; Tales Around the Common, p. 10; Dickinson Rich, Innocence Under the Elms, p. 22; Moore, Images of America; Bridgewater, p. 34; my essays on stores and services and manufacturing in Bridgewater, mainly dealing with the years 1900 to 1910, have numerous
shop, do business at one of Bridgewater’s two banks, pick up mail at the central post office in the Bank building, get a haircut, attend a hat-making session of milliner E. A. Hermann, attend the town meeting in the 1843 Town Hall, or enjoy the summer evening band concerts on the Common. While many parishioners walked to Sunday morning services or Masses at one of the town’s eight churches, others, both near and some distance away, “hitched up” their carriages and headed for the horse sheds maintained by some churches. In the summer of 1901, the Central Square Congregational Church, the town’s largest Protestant parish, repaired its sheds and, two years later, the Unitarian Church on School Street, also known as the First Parish, went even further by constructing new ones to the rear of its sanctuary.\(^\text{10}\)

Horses were an integral component of several recreational activities. Hay and sleigh rides and accompanying parties were common enough in this decade, with some folks looking forward to the first appreciable snowfall. “Joseph Carr of Broad Street Market,” commented the Bridgewater Independent on December 9, 1904, “was certainly the first and perhaps the only sleigh rider on this first snow.” Sleighing parties from other communities at times stopped at the Bridgewater Inn, which served good and reasonably priced meals and provided accommodations for horses and sleighs. Churches used horse-drawn “barges” to transport their Sunday School “scholars” to the site of the annual picnic when it was not on a trolley route or easily reached by walking. In early July of 1903, children of the newly-built First Baptist church on Summer Street undoubtedly were excited as they boarded such a conveyance and headed east on Plymouth Street to Robbins’ Pond in East Bridgewater. For adults and children, with a different entertainment penchant, watching the “much-postponed trotting races on Lake Nippenickett” on a Saturday afternoon in February of 1904 perhaps had a greater appeal. One wonders what the horses thought about the crowd of almost 1200 race fans and the numerous automobiles, “crowded to the fenders,” which had come “from surrounding towns and Brockton and Taunton.” There must have been a thunderous burst of applause from the Bridgewater horse-racing fans when “Oak Leaf, owned by Frank D. Barr of Hale Street, proprietor of Bradford House, took the honors.” Sometimes the entertainment put on by horses was unplanned and could pose a danger… On the evening of June 27, 1901, a “horse belonging to J. Balboni, proprietor of the fruit stand on Broad Street, did a short sprint up the west side of the common…but was stopped before any damage was done.” “Those having front row seats on the references to those enterprises employing horses; some of these citations are used again in this footnote.
hotel piazza,” it was reported, “enjoyed the performance exceedingly….”

With over four hundred local horses and many others passing through the town, it is not surprising that in the early 1900’s there were around ten blacksmith shops, located in various parts of Bridgewater. Their work, while not limited to providing services to horse owners, included horseshoeing and jobbing, carriage work and repairing, and, in some cases, building carts and wagons to order. The oldest of these businesses was owned by Southworth Harlow, a native of nearby Halifax, who established his first shop on Broad Street around the end of the Civil War, at a site where some thirty years later Joseph Balboni was to start his fruit enterprise. Remaining at this location only for a very short time, Harlow then moved a short way down Broad Street. His establishment was still thriving there in the first decade of the twentieth century, but poor health and advancing years led his one surviving son, Frank, to take over a few years before his father’s death in 1911. William Doble, one of Harlow’s employees, opened his own blacksmith business on Plymouth Street, nearly opposite Spring Street, in late 1911.

Not as centrally located as Harlow’s, other blacksmith shops served different areas of the town. One of them, located on Spring Street, not too far from Harlow’s, was acquired in late March of 1901 by E. V. Tyler from H. R. Bailey, who had purchased the shop from C. A. McLellan two years earlier. Among other things, Tyler paid: “Particular attention to lame or interring horses.” This enterprise again changed hands in 1907 when Albert P. Molkoff of Belmont, New Hampshire, using the J. R. Callahan real estate agency, became the fourth owner of this blacksmith shop since the late 1890’s. While my present research is inadequate on chronology, other blacksmith shops in the early 1900’s included: Toole’s on Pleasant Street in Scotland; Eisenhauer’s on Summer Street; Lapham’s on Mount Prospect Street; and Monahan’s on High Street.

In the early 1900’s, Bridgewater still had a small number of livery stables. The one to the rear

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11 BI, Feb. 8, June 28, 1901, Dec. 19, 1902, Jan. 2, July 10, 1903, March 4, Dec. 9, 1904; I cannot refrain from mentioning that Samuel Eliot Morison’s *Oxford History of the American People*, while including more about horses than most American history surveys, devotes a bit more space to horse racing than the contribution of horses to the nation’s transportation system.
12 BI, June 30, 1911; Crane, p. 796; Richard Cross, “Bridgewater Then and Now,” 1867-1923,” BI, Feb. 22, 1924, also found in HH, p. 227; *Tales Around the Common*, p. 5; *Bridgewater Book; Pictorial History*, 1987, p. 44; Lord, “First Quarter of the Century in Bridgewater,” *Tales Around the Common*, pp. 45; see pages 34 to 36 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910.
13 BI, March 22, May 10, 1901, Oct. 4, 1907, Dec. 8, 1911, Feb. 2, April 12, July 12, 1912, Feb. 7, 1919; Lord, “The First Quarter of the Century in Bridgewater,” *Tales Around the Common*, pp. 44, 45, 47; *Tales Around the Common*, p. 5; once again I am indebted to J. Kenneth Moore, who, as the leading contributor to this last source, provided a list
of the Bridgewater Inn on the eastern side of Central Square was purchased in March of 1902 by George J. Alcott, the Inn’s energetic proprietor since 1898, from Albert J. Elwell, the owner of the block immediately south of the Inn. Between 1883 and 1896, this prosperous and well-known stable, it will be recalled, had been operated by Francis D. King. In 1897, Joshua W. Gibbs, a harness maker with a shop on Broad Street, succeeded King as the manager of this Central Square stable, retaining this position after it was purchased by Alcott. Often referred to as the Gibbs’s stable, extensive repairs were made and a new tar roof was added to the carriage shed in the summer of 1905. Across the Common on the western side of Central Square, where King’s had been located between 1865 and 1883, E. Nelson Fisher, a resident of nearby Eastondale, conducted a general livery business, providing accommodations for about twenty-five horses, some of which the town occasionally hired during a fire. Even before he established his Bridgewater business in 1901, Fisher was well-known by some in town since they used his stable at Silver Beach on Cape Cod Bay during their summer vacations. Reflecting a keen interest in horse racing, Frank D. Barr, owner of the Bradford House on Hale Street, hired Amos Ensher in 1904 to build an addition to the stable connected to this rooming house. When completed, the Independent reported that Barr’s stable was considered “one of the best of its kind in this part of the county.” Two other stables might be noted— one built in the fall of 1902 by B. Everett Howard in the eastern part of the town known as “Japan,” the other at the corner of Main and Center Street, operated by Thomas Keith. Collectively, these stables played at least a secondary role in the economic life of Bridgewater at a time when horses continued to number in the hundreds.14

With so many horses, it should come as no surprise that minor mishaps and more serious accidents involving horses were fairly frequent. If pedestrians were beginning to look both ways for oncoming automobiles, they had long been accustomed to the possibilities of being hit by or thrown from

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14 BI, Aug. 6, 1897, June 12, 1900, May 24, July 7, 1901, March 28, June 6, July 18, Oct. 10, 1902, Feb. 27, 1903, June 17, Aug. 5, Dec. 23, 1904, Aug. 25, Sept. 8, 1905, July 20, 1906, June 7, 1907, June 12, 1908, Dec. 31, 1909, Jan. 14, 1910, Feb. 2, June 28, July 12, 1912, Aug. 4, 25, 1922, Feb. 22, 1924; Atlas of Plymouth County, 1903; Crane, p. 796; Pictorial History, 1987, p.15; 1994, pp. 8, 72; since it summarizes the history of an important piece of property on the western side of Central Square, I quote the following from the June 28, 1912, edition of the Bridgewater Independence: “A real estate deal of considerable importance will be completed next Monday, when the final papers will be passed and Edwin Atkinson becomes the owner of the stable property which he occupies on Central Square, purchasing from Edward J. Murphy of Taunton, formerly of this town. This property consists of a large stable, with accommodations for about 25 horses, sheds and out-buildings, and about half an acre of land. It adjoins Mr. Atkinson’s homestead in the rear, which fronts on Church Street. This property was purchased in 1852 by the late Francis D. King and was sold to Mr. Murphy by his estate in 1902, Mr. King established the livery there in
a horse-drawn wagon or carriage. In late July of 1901, for example, Mrs. E. V. Tyler, shortly after her husband became the owner of the blacksmith shop on Spring Street, was knocked down when crossing Summer Street, near the general store operated by Crane and Burrill. She was carried across the street to the Kingman building (the old Washburn cotton gin office), where Dr. Franklin L. Warren had recently started what proved to be his long practice in Bridgewater. His patient was badly bruised, but fortunately had no broken bones. Most accidents, however, occurred when a horse, for whatever reason, got overly rambunctious, throwing the occupants of the carriage or sleigh to the ground. While Margaret Crane escaped with only a severely sprained ankle in April of 1905, after being spilled from her carriage at the corner of South and Pleasant Streets, also the site of several trolley mishaps in the early 1900’s, such had not been case four years earlier when Henry J. Miller, the owner of a tack manufacturing business on Hale Street, died in the prime of life as a result of an accident involving a runaway horse. On occasion, Dr. Calvin Pratt was called on to treat victims of horse-related accidents, such as in the case of William Sample of Pleasant Street, who in the fall of 1904 was thrown from his wagon while hauling wood. His fractured right leg necessitated medical attention at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.\footnote{15 BI, June 14, 28, July 5, 12, Dec. 20, 1901, Aug. 15, Nov. 14, Dec. 12, 1902, May 6, July 17, Sept. 11, 25, 1903, Sept. 30, Nov. 11, Dec. 16, 1904, April 14, Sept. 8, 1905, July 20, 1906, Feb. 11, March 25, 1910; “Warren, Franklin L., M.D., 1871 to 1941,—Physician,” HH, p. 279; “Pratt, Calvin, M.D., 1842 to 1922—Physician,” HH, p. 275.}

In an age when trolleys and automobiles were joining railroads as components of a man-made transportation system, creating in some ways a more complex traffic configuration in Bridgewater than exists a century later, it was almost inevitable that horse-related accidents, both major and minor, involved these newer modes of travel. Since the railroad tracks passed some distance east of Central Square, where traffic congestion was most prevalent, relatively few major accidents were caused by the contact between real horses and “iron horses,” as the steam trains were often called. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the town, in particular the communicants of St. Thomas Aquinas Church, were deeply saddened to hear in June of 1907 that James Neville of North Street, a well-known contractor in town, had succumbed to injuries he received a month earlier when he and his horse were struck by the Fall River Express as it crossed over the Wall Street Crossing.\footnote{16 BI, May 17, June 28, 1907.}

Accidents between horses-drawn conveyances and electric trolleys, a mode of transportation in
Bridgewater that was only a few years old as the new century began, were not uncommon, as they both traversed some of the same major streets. On a Monday afternoon in July of 1901, shoppers in Central Square, perhaps some of whom were taking a rest on a bench in the Common, were a bit surprised to see a horse, “getting beyond control of the driver,” running through Central Square and down Broad Street after being frightened by an electric car. In this incident, luckily, the horse was stopped before damage was done. More serious were mishaps in which a horse and buggy collided with an “electric,” as a trolley was often called. A carriage being driven by Oliver O. Keith of Bridgewater was struck by an “electric” in North Raynham on February 1, 1903. Keith was spilled to the ground, while the horse, freeing himself from the conveyance, ran away and eventually turned up in nearby Easton. The trolley, evidently unscathed, took Keith, who was not physically hurt, but had no memory of the accident, to Taunton. Joshua E. Crane, Jr., a well-known citizen of Bridgewater and the head librarian at the Taunton Public Library from 1895 to 1931, recognized the young man at the station and accompanied him back to their home town.\footnote{BI, Aug. 24, 1895, July 26, 1901, Feb. 6, 1903, June 28, Aug. 30, Dec. 13, 1907; Pictorial History, 1994, p. 75;}

Despite the relatively few motor vehicles in Bridgewater during the early 1900’s, their sight, noise, and movement could be disconcerting to horses, not yet accustomed to sharing so many streets with other forms of transportation. In the late spring of 1902, James Franklin McElwain, well-known as one of the managers of the important shoe factory on Perkins Street, and his wife Mary, an early participant in the Village Improvement Society, were treated to a brief joyride in their carriage when their horse was frightened by Dr. William F. Whitmarsh’s automobile and ran down Summer Street to Swift’s Hill. In the following summer, a passing automobile caused the horse of Harlan P. Shaw, a member of the Bridgewater Normal School and a stalwart of First Baptist Church, to jump, threatening to topple the family’s carriage. He and his wife, also an ardent contributor to the life of their church, were not harmed, but their young daughter, Elizabeth, was tossed from the carriage and struck her head on the ground. She was taken to Dr. Pratt’s office and appeared to have sustained no serious injury, despite the fact that the blow had left her unconscious for a brief time. Collisions involving horses and automobiles also occurred in the outlying parts of the town. On December 12, 1907, a horse and buggy owned and driven by Thomas Kelley of Scotland was “completely wrecked” in an encounter with a motor vehicle on
Pleasant Street. I don’t know who the driver was, but, being a gentleman, he “called on Mr. Kelley later in the evening and settled for the damages he had caused.” Perhaps this last accident might have been avoided if both parties had read the following advice given by the Independent a year earlier: “It would be well, until the autoist is educated in the common sense management of his machine, for the pedestrian and owner of horses to exercise a little more than the ordinary amount of caution in traversing the public streets.” Similar accidents in Bridgewater were to occur well into the twentieth century, but slowly became less common as the number of horses declined, and state laws, beginning in 1903, started regulating the use of automobiles, including requirements drivers were to follow when sharing streets with horses and the conveyances they pulled.18

Many inhabitants of Bridgewater retained an affinity for horses in the early twentieth century even as they turned to man-made forms of transportation. “One of the gray horses belonging to the town was taken sick Monday morning,” the Independent reported on July 19, 1901, adding that he “is under the care of veterinary, but there are grave hopes of his recovery.” In a bit of an overstatement, Louise Dickinson Rich, commenting about the horses in the town stable in back of the fire station on School Street, wrote many years later that they “were more important, more real personalities, to us than most of the adults we knew.” Perhaps some “adults” would have taken umbrage with this comparison, but they too were saddened to hear to about the passing of horses long-known to them. Such was case on a Saturday in the early spring of 1904 as word spread amongst the residents of South Street that two familiar horses had “gone on to the green pastures…. It was deemed newsworthy to report when horses, some of whom had been given human names, were injured, found frozen to death, drowned in the Town River, or succumbed to lockjaw.19

The deaths of two horses in 1903 proved to be especially poignant for many folks in Bridgewater. “Jim the blind stallion belonging to Mr. Isaac H. Phinney of Summer Street is no more,” the Independent solemnly announced on March 6, 1903. Ever since the dedication of the Memorial (Public) Library in the early 1880’s both this horse and his master, a Civil War veteran, had led the procession on Memorial Day, in some ways Bridgewater’s most celebrated public holiday. It was later

written that “Jim” had “entered into the spirit of the occasions with almost human intelligence.” Two months after his death, old “Major,” the twenty-seven year-old horse belonging to Martin Wood of Curve Street also passed away. Many citizens who had attended the popular annual fall fairs of the Plymouth County Agricultural Society on its grounds off Broad Street recalled this horse winning the blue ribbon in the drawing contests year after year. While horses still played an economic, social, and cultural role in the Bridgewater of the early 1900’s, the death of these two beloved animals symbolized, it might be said, the incipient decline of an era of over two centuries in which the town’s inhabitants had relied mightily on horses in many ways, but in particular as a mode of transportation.

**Railroads to 1900**

The mid-1840’s was an exhilarating time for the citizens of the small community of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, as they attended annual meetings in the new town hall (still occupied in the early twenty-first century), witnessed the construction of the first Normal School building in America, and realized the local iron works was becoming central to the town’s economic well-being and gaining recognition in other place, near and far. For many, however, it was the establishment of railroad accommodations in 1846, connecting Bridgewater northward to Boston, the state capital, and southward to Fall River, a city on its way to becoming a leading textile center, that best illustrated their town’s part in an emerging continental market, a hallmark of the nation’s economic expansion in the mid-nineteenth century. By the time this new mode of transportation made its debut in Bridgewater, around twenty years after the Baltimore & Ohio became the first American railroad line, the “principal of the steam-hauled railway” had been established, replacing the initial, but short-lived, practice of using horses to pull the train cars along the tracks. (Perhaps these hard-working domesticated animals found solace in having steam locomotives often called “iron horses.”) By the end of 1840’s, there were some 9,000 miles of railroad tracks in the United States, two-thirds of them located in the New England and Mid-Atlantic states. While the number of tracks passing through Bridgewater was an infinitesimal portion of this total

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20 At *Work*, p. 243.

20 BI, March 6, May 22, 1903, Jan. 24, 1919; after the death of “Jim,” Phinney continued to lead every parade in Bridgewater until two years before his death in 1919.
mileage, and would remain so as the national railroad network expanded greatly in the last half of the 1800’s, the role of this man-made mode of transportation in the life of the town cannot be overestimated, even though horses remained essential to Bridgewater’s overall transportation system.21

A detailed account of how the railroad came to Bridgewater and its significant contribution to the town’s development during the second half of the nineteenth century is not within the purview of this work. But some salient points of this story help provide background for the important role rail transportation was to play between 1900 and 1910. Organized mainly by Kingston and Plymouth men in 1844, the Old Colony Railroad, following the usual practice of securing a state charter, began the construction of a thirty-seven mile rail route from South Boston southward through Kingston to Plymouth. Shortly after the opening of this road was duly celebrated on November 10, 1845, the Old Colony began extending its rail network to connect Abington and Bridgewater. Simultaneously, the Middleborough Railroad Corporation was chartered to build a line between Fall River and Bridgewater. In 1846, the tracks of these two railroads met at the site of the Bridgewater Iron Company, located off High Street on the Town River. Credited with producing “the first railroad iron” in New England, rails from this firm were used by the Old Colony Railroad, which between 1854 and 1862 was part of an official merger known as the Old Colony and Fall River Railroad. The junction of the two lines was known as the Bridgewater Iron Works station until the 1890’s, at which point, reflecting the virtual demise of the Bridgewater Iron Company, the station was renamed Bridgewater Junction.22

The arrival of rail transportation was an immediate boon to the industrial economy of Bridgewater, connecting this small community of around 3,000 in 1850 to markets, sources of labor, and

21 Crane, pp. 772, 785; Bridgewater Book, p. 23; John F. Stover, “Railroads,” The Reader’s Companion to American History, ed. by Eric Foner and John A. Garraty (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), pp. 906-910; hereafter cited by author and Reader’s Companion; also see John F. Stover, American Railroads (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961); Michael Swift, Great American Railroads: A Photographic History (New York City: Metro Books, 2006), pp. 8-12; Greene, Horses at Work, pp. 71-72,121; one of the themes of Greene’s study, which is certainly applicable to Bridgewater, is the complementary relationship between horses and railroads; since railroads played a dominant role in nineteenth century America, it is not surprising that there is an extensive bibliography on this subject.

22 BI, March 20, 27, 1914; Crane, pp. 772, 821; History of the Old Colony Railroad: A Complete History of the Old Colony Railroad from 1844 to the Present Time (Boston, Mass.: Hager & Handy Publishers, 1893), pp. 40-47; Bridgewater Book, p. 23; HH, pp. 142-143, 178; Melville, History of Kingston, pp. 109-110, 288, 374; Townscape Institute, p. 23; Richard C. Barrett, Boston’s Depots and Terminals: A History of Downtown Boston’s Railroad Stations (Dexter, Michigan: Thomson-Shore, Incorporated, 1996), pp. 101, 103, 106, 110; I am indebted to this latter source for a chronology of railroad ownership and control in southeastern Massachusetts between 1845 and 1893; in March of 1914, the Bridgewater Junction became officially known as the Stanley Junction, reflecting the name of the company that revitalized the town’s iron and steel industry after the decline of the Bridgewater Iron Company in the
Old Railroad Station—1847–1893
Off of Broad Street
(Rizer Collection)
raw materials in eastern seaboard cities and points further west. Writing about the Bridgewater Iron Company, the town’s premiere manufacturing concern of the nineteenth century, Joshua E. Crane in his 1884 History of Bridgewater averred that it “was not until 1846, when railroad accommodations were open with Boston and Fall River, that this company was able to take its present prominence among the largest iron manufactories of the country.” By the late 1840’s, the Perkins foundry and the Bates and Hyde cotton gin plant, both located to the south of the Bridgewater Iron Works, also began taking advantage of their proximity to the railroad. For many folks, however, it was the construction of the Old Colony depot in 1846 near the corner of Broad and Spring Streets that best symbolized the railroad’s presence in Bridgewater. Hardly an impressive structure, this wooden building, the town’s main railroad station until 1893, was soon facilitating passenger and freight services. The twenty or so years after the arrival of the railroad and the erection of this depot was a period of growth for Bridgewater, its industrial base expanding and its population reaching around 4,000 by the late 1860’s.\textsuperscript{23}

In the twenty-five years following the Civil War, as railway mileage reached the astounding figure of 164,000 in the United States, the Old Colony, which between 1872 and 1893 had sole control of the railroad system in southeastern Massachusetts, continued to serve Bridgewater, directly connecting it to other small and large communities in eastern Massachusetts and, equally important, to other lines that branched far beyond the borders of the Bay State. While trackage increased hardly at all in Bridgewater, railroad stops, including those at the iron works, Broad and Spring Street depot, Flagg Street crossing, and the South Bridgewater Station in Titicut, all played a role in providing rail accommodations. As had been the case from its beginning, much of the Old Colony’s business dealt with hauling freight to and from Bridgewater, with a separate building at the Broad Street station being the center of much of this activity. “Never before had there been so much freight passing over the Old Colony, through this town, as at the present time,” reported the Bridgewater Independent on May 22, 1886, going on to say that the “yards are full most of the time with cars awaiting transportation.”\textsuperscript{24}

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\item[\textsuperscript{23}] Census of Massachusetts, 1905, Vol. I, p. 819; Crane, p. 785; Bridgewater Book; Pictorial History, 1987, p. 26; Townscape Institute, pp. 23-28; Form 66, p. 203; Tales Around the Common, p. 21; see pages 5-8 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910; D. Moore, “Economy, Business, Industry, and Agriculture,” HH, p. 82; D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, pp. 33, 37.
\item[\textsuperscript{24}] BI, Oct. 10, 1885, May 22, Sept. 11, 1886; Pictorial History, 1987, p. 28; Stover, “Railroads,” The Reader’s Companion to American History, p. 908; D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, pp. 33-37; I am much in debt to
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Equally important, especially before the advent of the trolleys and automobiles, was the Old Colony’s passenger service, giving the town’s inhabitants, including a fairly modest number of daily commuters, access to communities in almost any direction, particularly northward to Boston. In her unpublished memoirs, Flora T. Little, nee Flora Phillips Townsend, writes nostalgically about how she “grew up with the railroad” in the late nineteenth century. Her reminiscences carry considerable weight since she was born in 1875 and spent her first twenty-seven years in the family home on Plymouth Street which was crossed by the Old Colony rails. Her brief comments on passenger service give us some idea of the clientele, which included workers, businessmen, shoppers, theatre goers, and students, especially those commuting to and from Bridgewater Normal, that made use of what she labels “the climax of comfortable commuter travel.” The trains allowed Townsend, an 1895 graduate of this institution, to further her education at the Massachusetts Normal School of Art in Boston, an enriching experience that would help her contribute so aesthetically to Bridgewater’s well-being for over sixty years. Whatever prompted one to use rail transportation to Boston or numerous other places, including Fall River, where one could catch a steamship to New York City, the train schedule of the Old Colony could always be found in the Independent. In the middle 1880’s, folks in Bridgewater were able to count on seven daily trips (only one on Sunday) to and from the state capital. By 1898, the number had increased to thirteen, hardly a niggardly schedule for town of around five thousand.25

Other than an occasional complaint about the Broad-Spring Street depot, labeled by one commentator as a “dingy and poorly constructed building” and by another as an “old, moss grown structure we are compelled to use,” it would appear that most Bridgewater citizens and businesses in the 1880’s appreciated the services rendered by the Old Colony. Commenting on plans in the spring of 1884...
to make the junction at the Iron Works station “less complicated,” the Independent averred: “The company is not behind hand in its efforts to accommodate the traveling public and our people are gratified at the improvements now in progress which no doubt mean better train accommodations in the near future.” Even the critics of the Broad Street station must have been pleased in the fall of 1885 when a new waiting room was “built …on the outward platform of the depot.” The wait at this stop was made more pleasant by James M. Leonard, “an obliging and courteous gentleman” and a member of the New Jerusalem Church, who by the 1880’s had been associated with the Old Colony line for around forty years, serving as the manager of the station for the last two decades of his career. At least on one occasion, the Bridgewater patrons of the Old Colony heard distressing news on their morning arrival at the depot. During one night in July of 1888, burglars, prying open two windows and a door, proceeded to blow open the safe. Perhaps the passengers cheered on hearing that the extent of the robbers’ booty was a mere “dollar in five-cent pieces.” Of greater significance was the construction in June 1885, two years after a disastrous fire had destroyed the Bridgewater State Workhouse, of a new wooden depot at Titicut, on the opposite side of the tracks from the old one. This station served North Middleboro and was of particular importance to the Bridgewater State Farm, successor to the Workhouse in 1886, as a point of arrival and departure for the different groups that made up its clientele. 

The last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed continuity and change in Bridgewater’s railroad service. In October of 1891, there was some consternation following the Old Colony’s decision to cancel the noon train from Bridgewater to Boston and the theatre one at 11:15 p. m. in the reverse direction. After being “the object the some pretty tall kicking in Bridgewater and Middleboro,” the line, listening to complaints from the business community and the town’s theatre goers, re-instated the old schedule. (Interestingly, over a century later Bridgewater still lacks a train late enough for many attending performances in Boston.) As had been the case for fifty years, Bridgewater industrial enterprises in the 1890’s relied greatly on rail transportation to receive natural resources and, in turn, send manufactured products to a variety of markets. Like older firms, including the Bridgewater Iron Works,
the Eagle Cotton Gin outfit, and the Perkins foundry and nail machine shop, newly established companies specializing in the manufacture of boxes, tacks, bricks, and shoes capitalized on their locations near the Old Colony, enhanced in some cases by laying spur tracks, as had the older companies, from their factories to the main line.27

The biggest change for Bridgewater train commuters was the construction of a new main depot, a short distance south of the old one, something the town inhabitants had long requested. In March of 1887, a committee of the Bridgewater Improvement Association (not to be confused with the organization of the same name formed in the early 1900’s), composed of well-known town citizens, Lewis G. Lowe, James C. Leach, Albert Gardner Boyd, Ira M. Conant, and George D. Davis, interviewed the management of the Old Colony Railroad, requesting a new station. How much influence this business-oriented group had in moving the line to take action is difficult to say since it was not until three years later two Old Colony managers arrived in Bridgewater to look over the old station and its surrounding grounds. The Independent’s guarded statement following this visit that it “is more than probable” Bridgewater would have a new station “this season” proved unfounded. A year later, however, prospects brightened, prompting this paper to write: “the old depot looks lonely. All the pictures and bills have been taken down and Bridgewater’s citizens hope that the depot itself will follow suit.” The old station, which had done its duties for almost fifty years, must have felt unappreciated when this local weekly concluded: “May a stray cyclone soon land the old shell among the graves of the antediluvians.” “Soon” turned out to be late June of 1893, almost a year after the Old Colony sold the tenement east of the old station to Sumner Keith, the town’s leading coal dealer, who then had it moved to “his land on Spring Street,” making more room for the new depot. Construction, featuring grey granite with brownstone trimmings, began in the summer of 1893, with predictions that it would cost “about $12,000.”28

Before the occupation of the new depot in February of 1894, the citizens of Bridgewater had had almost a year to get used to another basic change in their railroad system, which dated back to 1846. On

27 BI, Oct. 17, Nov. 21, 1891, Aug. 27, 1892, Aug. 19, 1898; History of the Old Colony Railroad, pp. 371-372; for a more detailed discussion of manufacturing firms in Bridgewater to 1900 see my essay on the town’s industrial activities to 1910.

28 BI, May 10, 1890, Feb. 14, 1891, Jan. 9, April 9, May 4, 1892, June 24, July 22, 1893; “Twenty Years Ago,” BI, March 15, 1907; for more on Keith’s coal yard see pages 43-44 and 100 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910.
March 1, 1893, reflecting a consolidation movement in the American railroad industry, the Old Colony was leased by the New York, New Haven & Harford Railroad, giving it control, if not direct ownership, of the railroad system of southeastern Massachusetts. The part of this amalgamation serving Bridgewater became known as the Old Colony Division of the Consolidated Railroad. (Throughout the remainder of this discussion on railroads, I will generally refer to this line as the Consolidated, as many of my primary sources do.) Some in the town were undoubtedly aware that “shippers, manufacturers and farmers elsewhere in the country,” stirred up over what they considered to be “exorbitant or discriminatory rates,” had for a number of years protested the power and influence of the big railroads and that, with the passage of Interstate Commerce Act in 1887, the federal government had begun to grapple with the need for some regulation of this important component of the American economy. In common with other communities in Massachusetts, however, Bridgewater citizens and businesses were generally satisfied with the “highly favorable rates” they were charged and the strong Massachusetts laws which protected them “against irresponsible management and discriminatory rates.” It would appear, therefore, folks in Bridgewater, anticipating the continuation of fair and efficient rail service, were not upset that the schedules and tickets were now labeled: “New York, New Haven & Hartford R. R.---Old Colony System.” Besides, the construction of the new depot was “being closely and eagerly watched” by Bridgewater citizens.” Two months before the station’s opening, the Independent congratulated the town for “putting one foot before the other in a dignified, yet steady progress.” Undoubtedly referring to other new undertakings, such as water and electric projects, the Bridgewater Box Company, and the recent addition to the Normal School, the town’s newspaper, continuing in a similar vein, went on to say: “Each year sees some new public work or private enterprise begun and carried forward.”

On Saturday evening, February 11, 1894, the opening of the new station, near the corner of

29 BI, Sept. 9, 16, 30, Dec. 16, 1893, Feb. 27, 1898; William J. Cunningham, “Transportation,” Commonwealth History of Massachusetts, edited by Albert Bushnell Hart (New York: Russell & Russell, 1930), V. 5, pp. 402-403; Richard M. Abrams, Conservatism in a Progressive Era: Massachusetts Politics, 1900-1912 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 125-126; for more on the issue of Massachusetts’s attitude toward railroads, including rate discrimination, my readers may wish to consult Abrams’s analysis; Barrett, Boston’s, Depots and Terminals, pp. 101, 104; Swift, Great American Railroads, p. 110; “Transportation,” HH, p. 178; see pages 27-28 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater to 1910; during the decade following the takeover of the Old Colony by the N. Y., N. H., and H., Bridgewater was to see some of its local industrial companies, including those manufacturing iron products, bricks, and cotton gins, also become “affiliated” with larger firms; for more on this see pages 13,16 and 33 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910; some of us who are a bit more mature will remember when the N. Y., N. H., and H. Railroad ceased it passenger service to Bridgewater in June of 1959.
Broad and Spring Streets, with access from Depot Street off Hale Street, was duly celebrated with “a jollification,” an informal reception, to which the officials of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad were invited. A committee consisting of James Cushing Leach, Albert G. Boyden, Samuel P. Gates and Lafayette Keith, all well-known by this time for their varied contributions to the town’s well-being, were on hand to greet officials of the railroad who arrived by special train to attend the affair.

No invitations were issued to the town’s citizens, “save a general one to everybody.” Most likely some folks decided to attend the hour-long event after hearing that the “Bridgewater band and Ferguson’s orchestra” would provide music for the occasion. Perhaps some of the attendees, planning to use the train on Monday morning, took note of the new ticket office of Charles W. Capel, the congenial station agent, who a few years earlier had become the successor of James M. Leonard, remembered for his kindly ways by many riders of the Old Colony line.  

Despite its small population of little more than 4,000 in 1893, Bridgewater, like many other American communities of late nineteenth century, took pride in having rail transportation, a feeling that grew even greater with the building of a new main station. Capturing this sentiment, the headlines of the Independent on February 10, 1894, although a bit hyperbolic, read:

BEST ON LINE OF ROAD
Bridgewater’s Convenient
And Commodious Depot
Citizens Delighted With the Improved
Facilities They Enjoy

Labeled as the “Full Description of the Arrangement of the Handsome Structure,” the piece following the headlines is likely the most detailed account we have of the new station, a facility that

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30 BI, Feb. 10, 1894, Oct. 5, 1895; Crane, pp. 828-829; “Leach, James Cushing, 1831 to 1895—Manufacturer, legislator,” HH, p. 269; “Leach, James Cushing,” One of a Thousand: A Series of Biographical Sketches of One Thousand Representative Men-Resident in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts- A, D. 1888-89. Edited by John C. Rand (Boston: First National Publishing Company, 1890), pp. 370-371; contributions of Gates, Keith and Boyden, all of whom lived into the twentieth century, have been cited and documented elsewhere in my work; I’m not quite sure of the old depot’s fate, but evidently it was not put up for sale and was torn down on the completion of the new depot; the Bridgewater Independent, expressing the view of many in town, hoped that it would “be gotten out of sight as
would serve rail passengers until 1959. Built at a cost of $20,000, it was designed by Bradford L. Gilbert, a New York architect, and built under the direction of Foreman H. F. Cross, representing Fales & Sons of South Framingham. Combining brownstone from Longmeadow in Springfield, Massachusetts, with granite from Milford, Massachusetts, the structure, ninety-six feet long and twenty-five feet wide, had “a solid and imposing appearance.” Wide projections of the slate roofs on all sides provided “protection in times of storms and burning sunshine.” Adding to the beauty of the building when lit up were portions of cathedral and spun glass contained in its windows and doors. Thanks to the urging of James C. Leach, known among other things for “manufacturing oil-proof paper used in the making of boots and shoes” and serving two terms in the General Court, the N. Y., N. H and H. Railroad “consented to add to the initial plans [drawn up by the Old Colony Line] the drive shelter [I assume horse-drawn carriages could approach this exterior addition from either Depot or Broad Streets] and several other conveniences and embellishments of the structure.” The grading of the grounds and the laying of the concrete walks would have to wait until the warmer weather.32

If darkness somewhat obscured the exterior of the new depot on that February evening in 1894, such was not the case with its interior. Only several years after electricity was first used in Bridgewater, “incandescent electric lights…, controlled by a switch in the ticket office,… hung plentifully in all rooms [of the new station] on combination fixtures,” which also permitted lighting by gas and kerosene. Attendees with aesthetic leanings especially appreciated the large chandelier hanging from the ceiling in the center of the spacious waiting room, measuring thirty-seven by twenty-five feet. Obvious to others was the extensive use of wood from oak and pine trees, plentiful in Bridgewater from its earliest days, used in all parts of the depot’s interior. On what might have been a cold winter night, perhaps all those at the reception enjoyed the coal-producing warmth emanating from the large radiator in the waiting room and smaller ones in other station areas, all “supplied with steam heat from the pumping house near at

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32 BI, Feb. 10, 1894, Jan. 19, Oct. 5, 1895; the obituary of Leach in the Bridgewater Independent read: “It was through him that the new railroad station was built;” Crane, pp. 828-829; Townscape Institute, Form 66, pp. 202-203; according to this latter source, Bridgewater’s new station was “similar to those on the Boston and Albany line built by H. H. Richardson during the early 1880’s…;” D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, p. 37; Pictorial History, 1987, p. 27; “Leach, James Cushing, 1831-1895—Manufacturer, legislator,” HH, p. 269; in a contradiction, which I have not resolved, the Bridgewater Independent on January 19, 1895, cites Bertram T. Wheeler of Boston as having had “the superintendence of the plans and construction of the new railroad” in Bridgewater; a reminder to my readers: census figures at this time included the “clientele” of the Bridgewater State Farm.
hand.” While mainly used for ventilation, a working brick and marble fireplace of “the most poetical suggestion” was part of an alcove at the northern end of the waiting room, perhaps placed there in deference to a generation accustomed to the coziness and utility of this heating system. Other areas of the new depot, if opened that night, that a curious-minded citizens might have inspected included: the ticket office, the ladies waiting and parlor rooms, the baggage storage, the passenger platform on the eastside of the station along the tracks, and the toilet rooms. These latter facilities were supplied with water by the Bridgewaters Water Company, a private concern, established in 1887, and whose main operations were located on Sprague Hill, near the corner of Broad and High Streets, about a half-mile east of the new railroad station.33

During the last six years of the nineteenth century, Bridgewater continued to rely on the rail transportation provided by the N. Y., N. H., and H. line. New industries, including the McElwain shoe factory, which was emerging as the town’s largest employer, and the Eastern Grain enterprise, joined older ones in taking advantage of their location near the railroad tracks. Indicative of the symbiotic relationship between the railroad and Bridgewater’s manufacturers were the brief statements in the Independent indicating the type and amount of products shipped from the town each week. Typical of these reports was that of October 26, 1900, which read: “The following shipments have been made from Bridgewater this week: W. H. McElwain & Co., 968 cases of shoes; Henry Perkins, one car of castings; Continental Cotton Gin Co., three cars of cotton gins; G. M. Hooper & Co., nine cars of bricks; W. B. May, 31 cases of slippers.” In May of 1900, following repairs to the freight station, there was talk about a new and larger one to accommodate the rapid increase in freight business, despite a recent pronouncement by the State Railroad Commissioners and high railroad officials, following a visit to Bridgewater, that they were “much pleased with the condition of everything.”34

While the station’s freight business was of paramount economic importance to the town and the railroad line, more citizens perhaps took greater note of the physical condition of the depot and the

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33 BI, Feb. 10, 1894; in a future essay, I plan to discuss electric and water facilities established by private companies in Bridgewater in the late 1880’s; may I suggest to my readers that they visit the Burger King eating establishment which now occupies the 1893 depot and, with the February 11, 1894, article and lunch in hand, try to visualize the station as it opened over a century ago; I was delighted to see the original fireplace still adorning the northern end of the main eating room, but looked in vain for the chandelier that originally graced the waiting room.

34 BI, Aug. 19, Oct. 14, 1898, Aug. 11, 1899, May 11, 18, Oct. 26, 1900; my readers my wish to consult my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater to 1910 to get a more detailed understanding of the relationship between its industries
railroad’s passenger service. Two years after the new station opened, the Independent, giving credit to station agent Capel, wrote that the “waiting room…presents a very attractive appearance, being adorned with ferns and running vines.” Despite some early criticism of the Consolidated for being slow in beautifying the station grounds, one visitor from Boston in June of 1900 cited Bridgewater as “the most attractive looking town on the Plymouth division of the Consolidated,” praising the attractiveness of its railroad station and surroundings and “the beautiful shaded street [Broad Street] leading up to the centre….“ One can imagine Capel walking down this thoroughfare daily from his residence on Union Street. The Independent, again acknowledging the work of Agent Capel, praised him and his assistants for the “pretty grass plots, the fountain and the well-kept walks and driveway” at the station.35

In a more pragmatic vein, students, businessmen, and shoppers could count on thirteen daily runs from Bridgewater to Boston, with six trips on Sunday, permitting some folks to spend a leisurely day in the state capital. There were occasional rumblings from riders inconvenienced by a change in scheduling. But the line was open to suggestions, and usually problems of this nature were worked out. A matter of greater urgency, although of short duration, for some passengers occurred in April of 1900, when repairs to the water tank necessitated “the closing of the toilet rooms in the station.” Then there were matters impacting state-town-railroad relations which caught even the attention of citizens generally not using rail transportation. As with other communities, the issue of safety at the seven railroad crossings in Bridgewater was always one of considerable concern to those crossing the tracks on foot, bicycles, and horse-drawn conveyances. Since the inauguration of Bridgewater’s trolley network in 1897, the railroad crossing at Broad Street, near the depot, was particularly problematic. Whether by walking or taking a trolley shuttle, it was easy enough to go back and forth between this crossing and Central Square. But in order to catch the trolley to East Bridgewater and beyond or the shuttle back to the Square, passengers had to cross the railroad tracks by foot, not always a safe undertaking if the crossing was not properly maintained. The seriousness of this situation prompted Bridgewater’s selectmen in December of 1897 to discuss the need for a railroad overhead crossing on Broad Street, a project that continued to be talked about, but never carried out. Of less import, but also involving safety considerations, was the decision of the N. Y., N. H & H. line in the spring of 1900 to extend the fence and the railroad.
between the rails and the McElwain shoe factory to Broad Street, with the hope of preventing accidents to workers grown accustomed to using tracks as a sidewalk.  

**Railway Service in Bridgewater, 1901-1910**

By 1901, steam trains had been a major component of Bridgewater’s transportation system for fifty-five years, with only horses and horse-drawn conveyances, employed since the middle of the seventeenth century, offering a major alternative in carrying goods and people hither and yon, until the arrival of the trolleys in 1897 and motorized vehicles a few years later. In 1893, the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad Company through a leasing system, rather than direct ownership, had taken control of the Old Colony, the original line serving Bridgewater, and called this part of its railroad network the Old Colony Division of the Consolidated Railroad. Continuing the movement toward consolidation, John Pierpont Morgan, America’s leading financier and one of a small number of railroad magnates who sought to dominate the nation’s railroads, gained control of the New Haven in 1903. With the aid of Charles S. Mellen, the chairmen of this line’s board of directors, Morgan attempted over the following decade to secure control of most of New England’s public transportation by, among other steps, consummating a merger with the Boston and Maine Railroad and purchasing street railway lines in Massachusetts, a step that was supposedly against state law. These moves have to be seen against the broader picture in which the federal government, under Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft, through such laws as the Elkins Act of 1903, Hepburn Act of 1906 and the Mann-Elkins Act of 1910, was trying to cope with the growing monopolistic nature of the country’s railroad industry.

How did Bridgewater, a Republican town in a Republican state, stand on the threat posed by railroad consolidation to economic competition, an idea long considered vital to American democracy and capitalism? How many of the town’s citizens were aware that “by 1906 about two-thirds of the nation’s

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mileage was controlled by seven rail groupings,” under the leadership of such men as James J. Hill, Edward H. Harriman, and Morgan. Most likely, the general reaction in Bridgewater was similar to that in Massachusetts as a whole. Throughout the decade, many of the state’s citizens and Democratic and Republican political leaders cast jaundiced eyes on the activities of the New Haven line and, indeed, the state’s Congressional delegation gave almost unanimous support to the final version of the Hepburn Act, Roosevelt’s most important effort to strengthen railroad regulation by increasing the power of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Massachusetts, however, was hardly in the vanguard of those pushing for more radical federal regulation of this powerful and important component of the national economy. The Commonwealth continued to maintain, with some justice, that her laws already protected the business community against irresponsible railroad management and unfair rates. Businesses in Massachusetts, including those manufacturing bricks, shoe, and iron and steel products in Bridgewater, had few of those complaints against the railroads, so prevalent in other parts of the country. Consequently, in the early 1900’s, as historian Richard M. Abrams asserts: “In Massachusetts, the railroad control issue did not claim much attention.”

Nevertheless, Bridgewater citizens, including manufacturers shipping goods or receiving natural resources, merchants relying on orders from Boston, professionals, shoppers and students, including those of Bridgewater Normal, commuting back and forth to the state’s capital, and vacationers heading to resort areas on Cape Cod, took great interest in the train network connecting their town to places near and far. Even those folks in Bridgewater who only occasionally rode the train to Boston could have identified with the sentiments of Dorothy Lord Mann, one of the Bridgewater Historical Collectors, who later wrote of her early years in the town: “Mother made a yearly trip to Boston on the train. She took one of us with her, in turn, because she felt it was a liberal education. We went to the State House or saw something she considered to be of educational value.” Still others went by rail to watch big league baseball games, seek medical care, or enjoy a play, concert, or some other form of entertainment a city of Boston’s size had to offer.

39 BL, July 12, Aug. 16, 1901; Dorothy Lord Mann, “I Remember…Or Was I Told,” Tales Around the Common, p.
Bridgewater, whose population was close to 7,000 by 1905, relied heavily, as many other American communities did, on goods carried by intercity railways. This was apparent in September-October of 1901 by the consternation among the town’s merchants created by the Consolidated’s decision, for reasons which were not clear, to change the freight schedule between this town and Boston. In a move that had been previously tried and proven untenable, this line again altered the long-standing procedure of delivering orders placed by the town retailers in the morning on the evening of the same day, so as to be available for consumers the following morning. Under the revised schedule, merchants were not to receive their shipments from Boston until the afternoon of the next day, hardly an optimum time for markets like A. I. Simmons, Bridgewater’s most important meat store, located in Central Square, and others, like Balboni’s on Broad Street, specializing in fresh produce. Realizing that freight charges would be exorbitant if an express train had to be used exclusively to deliver goods, especially perishable ones, all of the town’s merchants, with the newly created Commercial Club taking the lead, signed a petition calling for a return to the old schedule. This petition was never presented to the line’s management, however. C. W. Capel, “the enterprising station agent at Bridgewater,” was able to convince the Consolidated’s division and general superintendents to re-instate the old schedule starting on October 27. Not a crisis of long duration, this freight problem illustrates that decisions by the railroad could have an adverse effect on the town’s merchants and, thus, the shopping public.  

Of greater significance than this short-lived crisis concerning the change in the freight schedule was the pressing need for more adequate facilities to handle the increasing amount of shipping business, particularly at Bridgewater’s main railroad station. The building of the new depot in 1893 was welcomed by the commuters, especially those passengers who used rail transportation on a regular basis. But despite repairs made in the spring of 1900, the problems of an aging and inadequate freight house, located across two sets of tracks from the passenger depot, remained, exacerbated by the lack of ample side trackage to accommodate cars waiting to be loaded or unloaded. The situation became more acute in the very early 1900’s. The Consolidated’s freight capacity was stretched to its limit, trying to accommodate

52. BI, Oct. 4, 18, 25, 1901; Census of Massachusetts, 1905, Vol. I, p. 819; Stover, “Railroad,” Reader’s Companion to American History, p. 908; see pages 17-18, 27-28, 74-78, 82-83 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; at some point in my writing the ten year history of the Bridgewater Commercial Club will be discussed.
the thriving business of the McElwain shoe factory on Perkins Street and the newly created Bridgewater Brick Company, located on the Town River about a half mile northeast of the railroad station, on the old fair grounds of the Plymouth County Agricultural Society, off Broad Street. Reporting in July of 1901 that the new division superintendent of the Consolidated understood the need for extensive repairs to the freight house, the Independent urged the board of trade committee of the Bridgewater Commercial Club “to take a hand in the matter” and campaign for “a new freight house.” In October, as the railroad was reverting to the old freight schedule, there was talk of increasing the line’s capacity of loading or unloading seven cars to almost twice that number. It was suggested that there was “room for several tracks on the plot of ground which lies on the opposite side of Broad Street to the freight house, and also in the vicinity of Hutchinson’s lumber yard,” further east on Spring Street.31

The Consolidated finally got around to laying additional trackage in July of the following year. Originally, the plan had called for removing the coal sheds bordering the tracks near the Perkins foundry and then running “two tracks from the main line to the yard fence on Broad Street.” By the time the work commenced on July 18, the decision had been made to lay three new tracks instead of two, “so that Bridgewater shippers and consignees will have no difficulty in loading or unloading freight.” A gang of forty men was put to work on the project, and by the following Monday evening the additional tracks were ready to accommodate twenty-four additional cars. The Independent predicted that the increased freight capacity “should keep the Bridgewater shippers in good humor for many years,” but did not mention whether or not the line had fulfilled its promise of making extensive repairs to the freight house. The hopes for a new one seemed remote at this time.42

While many businesses took note of the greater freight service provided by the railroad line in 1901, the passenger schedule and the accessibility of the stations, in particular the main one on Broad Street, were of more immediate concern to those townspeople commuting to Boston or visiting one of the

31 BI, July 5, October 25, 1901; D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, p. 34; for a discussion of McElwain’s shoe business see pages 24-27, 30-31, 33-43 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910; in the same essay, see my discussion of the Stanley Works on pages 13-14, 31-32, 48-54; for the early history of Hutchinson’s lumber yard between Spring Street and the railroad tracks see pp. 28, 85-86, in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910.

42 BI, July 5, Oct. 25, 1901, July 11, 18, 1902; a discussion of the Perkins enterprise can be found on pages 8, 16, 18, 32, 58-60 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910; for comments about the express companies in Bridgewater that relied on the railroad and horse-drawn wagons to deliver packages to town residents, see pages 35, 114-115, in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, p. 35.
many other smaller communities in eastern Massachusetts served by the Consolidated. Riders could check the local schedule published every Friday by the Independent or could pick up a “convenient pocket timetable” at the newspaper’s quarters, located since 1898 in the Independent Block on the western side of Central Square. Schedules could also be obtained at one of the town’s four train stops. Departure and arrival times naturally varied a bit from place to place, and not every train stopped at each location, particularly the one on Flagg Street. Generally speaking, commuters using the Broad Street depot could count on twelve runs a day to and from Boston, with stops along the way, allowing the earliest riders to arrive in the state capital by eight in the morning and be back in Bridgewater, by the latest, at eight in the evening. Six Sunday trains made the trip back and forth to Boston, and the late Saturday night train continued, as it had for many years, to accommodate theatre goers.43

The Consolidated’s passenger service from 1901 to 1910 appears to have been adequate to meet the needs of Bridgewater. There were occasional scheduling disagreements, however, between the town’s rail passengers and the railroad, with the latter usually willing to compromise as long as a scheduling request by one community did not adversely impact the train schedules of other communities in the railway network. Like other towns and cities served by the Consolidated, Bridgewater was not slow in reacting to schedule changes perceived to be detrimental to its interests. In late May of 1902, the Commercial Club, led by its president John M. Stetson, long associated with Bridgewater’s iron industry, was on the verge of “securing a monster petition…,” protesting the cancellation of the Bridgewater morning and afternoon stops on what were mostly express runs between Boston and Cape Cod. In a meeting with G. T. Taylor, superintendent of the railroad’s Plymouth division, Stetson pointed that this train had been stopping in Bridgewater for many years, not only accommodating passengers, but also picking up late afternoon mail. Voicing “kindest feelings toward the town” and recognizing that it “had given the road a great deal of business…,” Taylor, nonetheless, supported the Consolidated’s action, pointing out that some Cape passengers were already objecting to a stop at Harwich, which they maintained was compromising the “express” nature of this train. An impasse was fortunately avoided by Taylor’s promise that the line would run another scheduled train between Bridgewater and Boston, at

43 BI, July 3, Nov. 13, 1903, April 15, June 3, 1904; see pages 44 to 46 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910 for information on the changing location of the Bridgewater Independent between 1877 and 1900.
times close to those of the stops that had been eliminated. He also saw no reason why the mail could not be picked up under the new arrangements.  

During the rest of the decade there continued to be changes in train schedules, with varying impacts on Bridgewater’s ridership. Some commuters were inconvenienced in July of 1904 by the railroad’s decision to do away with the direct run between Bridgewater and Whitman, instead requiring passengers to first go to Westdale, a section of East Bridgewater. On the other hand, it was “positively stated…that trains on the mainline to Middleboro and the Cape…” would not change. In November of the same year, the patrons of Flagg Street station in Bridgewater were “exceedingly grateful” to Frank S. Williams of Auburn Street and George A. Turner. This Bridgewater citizen and representative in the state legislature convinced the railroad line to add to this stop “six trains daily, making five in each direction,” and thus giving this easterly section of the town, which did not have the benefits of trolley service, “very desirable” train service. In March of 1905, the rail needs of Bridgewater, East Bridgewater and Whitman were discussed in four conferences with “the authorities of the N. Y., N. H. & H. R. R.,” at which Bridgewater’s interests were represented by Pliny Jewell 2d, the editor of the Independent and president of the town’s Commercial Club. While East Bridgewater was promised that its train service would “be materially improved by May 1,” Bridgewater’s request for a morning “workmen’s train” from its Broad Street station to Whitman was denied. Rather, such a train would leave from nearby Elmwood. This decision was related to the railroad’s policy of doing away with “Bridgewater as a terminal.” Changes in passenger and freight schedules in the early 1900’s, it should be noted, would warrant a more detailed discussion in a volume devoted solely to the history of the town’s railroad service.  

Knowing departure and arrival times was only part of the planning facing a Bridgewater rail commuter in the early 1900’s. Equally important was the accessibility of the four stations, serving a population in 1910 of about 8,000, unevenly spread out over twenty-eight squares miles. With around two-thirds of Bridgewater’s inhabitants living more or less within walking distance of Central Square,

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44 BI, Aug. 16, 1901, May 30, 1902. 
45 BI, July 22, Nov. 4, 1904, March 31, 1905; see page 91 in my essay on education in Bridgewater through 1910 for the role played by Turner in getting the state legislature to appropriate funds for the building of a new gymnasium at Bridgewater Normal; this facility opened in the spring of 1905 and is the oldest building on the campus of Bridgewater State College; it is now occupied by the Art Department; for more on Jewell see pages 45, 104-105, in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; I’m assuming that Williams is the same person who between 1894 and 1902 was one of the proprietors of the Broad Street Market; for more on this market see pages
many train riders found it easy enough to continue on foot to the Broad Street station, particularly if the weather was not too cold or stormy. Since 1898, however, many railroad and trolley users, perhaps less conscious of the need for exercise, were just as likely to make use of the Broad Street electric shuttle to transport them to the depot. In April of 1910, the Independent likened the ride to that provided by “the old tilting board of your childhood, or the more modern thriller, the roller coaster.” In these years before automobile ownership necessitated parking facilities at the Broad Street station, some rail passengers, likely possessing greater means than most folks, enjoyed the distinction of being driven to the depot in a horse-drawn conveyance and temporarily parking under the drive shelter, a last minute addition to the 1893 station. Whether or not ladies were helped in alighting from their carriages this writer can’t say, but surely porters were on hand to help them with their baggage.\textsuperscript{46}

Not all rail passengers began their commute at the Broad Street depot, since the trains could be boarded at three other smaller stations. The South Bridgewater Station, located a bit north of the Titicut Street railroad crossing, served the inhabitants of this southwestern section of Bridgewater and North Middleboro. Generally known as the Titicut stop, this facility, as previously pointed out, was also essential to Cook’s brickyard and the Bridgewater State Farm. The Consolidated’s weekly schedule announced that “All accommodation trains stop at Titicut,” an indication that many of the farm’s thousand or so “residents,” including paupers, insane persons, and criminals, arrived at and hopefully, in some cases, departed from this state institution by using rail transportation. The small building or station at the crossing on Flagg Street, a short distance from its intersection with Summer Street, was hardly an impressive structure, but, as earlier noted, the residents of this eastern area of Bridgewater were pleased in November of 1904 to get an expanded schedule of arrivals and departures. Located northwest of the Wall Street rail crossing, the Bridgewater Junction Station, originally called the Iron Works Station, served the needs of this neighborhood between the early 1890’s and 1914. More than once an uninformed passenger unwittingly alighted the train at this stop, thinking they had reached the town’s main railroad depot on Broad Street. Hopefully this did not happen after the station was officially

\textsuperscript{46} BI, April 6, 1910; Pictorial History, 1987, p. 27; my comments about the concentration of population in the general area of Central Square are based upon the fact that in late 1901 about 560 houses and 2520 people, over a third of the town’s population, became eligible for Rural Free Delivery, owing to their distance from the post office in the center of the town.
renamed the Stanley Junction in 1914, reflecting the symbiotic relationship which had developed between this northwestern section of Bridgewater and the Stanley Iron Works, successor to the nineteenth century Bridgewater Iron Company. Many residents of South, Pleasant, Main, and adjoining Streets were not within a reasonable walking distance to a railroad station. Beginning in the late 1890’s, however, street railways, popularly known as trolleys or “electrics,” along these thoroughfares helped railroad commuters reach Central Square, where they could then walk or take the electric shuttle to the Broad Street depot. Prattown and Darlington, outlying districts in the far eastern part of Bridgewater, on the other hand, did not have the advantage of either electric or steam propelled forms of transportation. Before the widespread use of motorized vehicles after 1910, many town residents, especially those living in these eastern districts, had to rely on horse-drawn wagons to get them to a railroad station.  

As important as passenger service and accessibility to a station were to some Bridgewater citizens, especially those traveling to Boston every day, the “commuter community,” when compared to later years, hardly constituted a significant portion of the town’s population. Most folks, nevertheless, soon heard of or later read about local rail accidents in the Independent, with those involving fatalities undoubtedly eliciting the greatest number of sad comments. On June 5, 1903, following a headline that read “H. E. IRISH RUN OVER,” this newspaper went on to describe the “horrible accident” in which Hiram, a switchman at the Broad Street freight yard, “must have stumbled over a tie, throwing him in the path of the engine…he was switching.” Only forty-eight, Irish, who lived with his brother-in-law Clarence Sturtevant of Broad Street, had worked at the yard for five years and had been counted among “the most careful men ever employed there,” a consideration adding to the mystery of what had caused this tragic accident. Almost four years later, the town again was equally shocked to learn that forty-three old James Neville of North Street, one of the best known local contractors, had been struck, along with his horse, by the Fall River express at “Wall Street crossing just above Bridgewater Junction.” Despite the amputation of part of his right leg at the Brockton Hospital, there were lingering hopes for his recovery. About a month later, however, he succumbed to his injuries. Conducted by Reverend William E. Kelly,

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47 BI, Nov. 13, 1903, April 15, 1904, March 20, 27, 1914; An anonymous Bridgewater Adventurer, “Bridgewater About 1910 to 1920,” HH, p. 231; Pictorial History, 1987, p. 28; 1994, p. 27; D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, pp. 35-36; the author of this last source has suggested that the “small building or station” at the Flagg Street crossing “may have been a little bigger” than the ones at some of the other rail crossings because it needed “to serve the needs of the Gammons Sawmill, located in the field southwest of the crossing….” see the brief discussion
the senior pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Church since 1888, the funeral service was attended by an exceptionally large crowd of mourners, including his bearers, all prominent members of Bridgewater’s large Irish community. Far less serious in its consequences was an accident on February 12, 1910, involving Annie Hackett of Green Street, who worked in the office of the recently built L.Q. White shoe factory on Spring Street. Struck by a freight car when crossing the tracks, she had the “presence of mind” to throw her legs away from the tracks “in time to prevent serious injury.” She was assisted to the Bridgewater Inn in Central Square, “bordering on a nervous collapse, but upon “examination...was found to have escaped with a badly bruised back.” While these accidents, along with others involving trolleys and motorized vehicles, illustrate the potential hazards of these man-made forms of transportation in the early 1900’s, most Bridgewater inhabitants would not have opted for a return to the days of getting around exclusively by horse and buggy.48

**Electric Street Cars in Bridgewater --1890-1900**

When electric street railways made their debut in Bridgewater in 1897, this form of public transportation, born in the United States, was entering its second decade of phenomenal expansion and had pretty much replaced horse railways. Much of the credit for this conversion to a pollution-free and comparatively fast and economical way of traveling goes to Frank Julian Sprague, a former naval officer and employee of Thomas A. Edison, who in 1887 established a network of street railway cars in Richmond, Virginia, powered by overhead electric wires. Commonly called the trolleys or the “Electrics” (or trams in Europe), this new mode of travel within and between urban communities rightly earned Sprague the title “Father of Electrical Traction.” “Embraced...with extraordinary rapidity and enthusiasm,” electric trolleys initially faced little competition from automobiles, another invention of the late nineteenth century. By 1893, more than two-hundred and fifty electric railway companies had been incorporated in the nation and sixty percent of its 12,000 miles of street railways were electrified. A

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48 BI, June 14, 1901, June 5, 1903, May 17, June 28, 1907, Feb. 18, 1910; Ralph S. Bates, “Bridgewater Background,” HH, pp. 33-44; I am indebted to Dr. Bates, a longtime professor at Bridgewater State College, for the idea of the “commuter community;” for more on Father Kelly see pages 20-22, 80-93 in my essay on churches in Bridgewater through 1910.
decade later, the mileage of trolley tracks had increase to 30,000, with almost all of them electrified. One historian has labeled this transportation phenomenon “one of the most rapidly accepted innovations in the history of technology.”

Most inhabitants of the small community of Bridgewater could not have recited these statistics. But many were becoming aware that a transportation system based on horses-drawn wagons and steam railroads limited the ability of many to travel to other places. Perhaps influenced by talk in 1886 of building a horse railway connecting the nearby communities of Plymouth and Kingston, there was discussion in 1887 concerning the desirability of similar railways between Bridgewater and East Bridgewater and between Taunton and the center of Bridgewater by way of Raynham and Scotland. That nothing came of these suggestions for horse-drawn trolleys proved fortuitous, however. In 1888, when construction of the Plymouth & Kingston Street Railway finally began, in good measure to meet the transportation needs of the Plymouth Cordage employees, it was decided to follow in Sprague’s footsteps in using electricity instead of horses as the motive power. The street railway system that would serve Bridgewater would similarly be powered, but did not make its debut until almost a decade after the building of such pioneer roads as the Plymouth & Kingston.

Unlike some of its neighbors, including Brockton, Kingston, Plymouth, and Whitman, Bridgewater was not among earliest communities in Plymouth County to enjoy the benefits of electric streetcars. This was not for lack of trying. In late 1890, citing the immediate success of the Plymouth-Kingston line, which relied almost exclusively on local traffic, private individuals from Bridgewater were among those who began to agitate for “a line of electric street cars between Middleboro and Brockton via North Middleboro, Bridgewater and West Bridgewater.” Appealing to would-be investors, these early advocates of this project argued that “such a line is a necessity and would be patronized so generously as to pay a dividend the first year.” But it was not until the spring of 1892 that talk about constructing this street railway became more serious. Following its headline “ALL


50 “Twenty Years Ago,” BJ, Feb. 1, Dec. 27, 1907; O. R. Cummings, Trolleys in the Land of the Pilgrims-1886-1928 (Forty Fort, PA: Printed and sold by Harold E. Cox), p. 5; Melville, Major Bradford’s Town: A History of
ABOARD” the Bridgewater Independent announced that “a movement” had been started for an electric railroad to connect Bridgewater and West Bridgewater with Brockton. If this could be done, citizens of Bridgewater could use Brockton street cars to travel to “other towns to the east and north of the city and eventually with connecting lines to Boston.” At the same time, the possibility of building a street railway from Taunton through Bridgewater to Brockton was seriously being considered. It was estimated that $60,000 would be needed to build a road from Bridgewater’s Central Square through West Bridgewater to its boundary with Brockton, a distance of six miles. This sum did not include the construction of a power plant. Despite the assurance of “a gentleman,” who was “connected with a large electrical company,” that if the citizens of Bridgewater could raise half of this sum, he “could place the rest easily,” the year ended with the project still at the talking stage.51

Bridgewater would not see trolleys passing along its main streets during the next few years, owing in good measure to the national financial crisis of 1893 and the ensuing depression. Hopes for a network of electric railways remained alive, nevertheless. In April of 1893, a public hearing was held in the Town Hall to discuss the possibility of running lines from Brockton to Bridgewater and East Bridgewater. There was little opposition to the plan, and it was assumed that Bridgewater would “doubtless grant the franchises,” allowing a rail street company to operate within its boundaries. These predictions were realized on June 3, when Bridgewater’s selectmen, Stillman Alger, LaFayette Keith, and Zeno Benson approved the petition. The projected one-way fare of ten cents must have seemed more than reasonable to many of the townsfolk, who anticipated shopping or finding employment in a city that was already known as one of the nation’s main shoe manufacturing centers. But, alas, it soon became apparent that the building of these lines and others emanating from Brockton would have to be delayed because of the “stringent conditions of the money market.” In their 1893 annual report, the selectman, tersely, and somewhat Biblically, wrote that a “business depression swept over the land and the railways were not constructed.”52

51 BI, Oct. 25, 1890, April 9, 1892.
52 BI, April 13, June 24, 1893, Jan. 16, 1914; “Report of the Selectmen,” Annual Town Report, 1893 (Bridgewater: Massachusetts: Henry T. Pratt, Printer, 1894), pp. 25, 42; the remaining annual town reports of the 1890’s appear not to mention the issue of the “electrics” again, reflecting the fact that the building of a street railway system was essentially a private enterprise undertaking; H. W. Brands, The Reckless Decade: America in the 1890s (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), numerous pages.
Nonetheless, a street railway connection between Brockton and Bridgewater was still anticipated, as evidenced by the granting of a franchise for the project by Bridgewater’s selectmen to the Brockton and Bridgewater Street Railway Co. in the spring of 1894. This company was given a year to lay tracks on Main and Broad Streets in Bridgewater, but had to forfeit its franchise when nothing was done during the allotted time. Arguing that financial conditions had made it impossible to carry out the provisions of the original franchise, the same company petitioned for another one in the spring of 1895. The request was met with a degree of skepticism at a hearing in Town Hall. One attendee asked A. C. Ralph, general manager of the Brockton Railway Co., “Does your company mean business?” His answer was a resounding “Yes, sir, they do.” Reflecting the overwhelming sentiment for the line, the selectmen granted the request. Before the meeting was adjourned the matter of how the tracks would enter Bridgewater’s Central Square was raised. While open to suggestions, Ralph thought “that if the road came directly down Main Street and through the square to a point nearly opposite the Town house, that the majority of the people would be benefited.” Some of those present opposed this route, arguing that the “track should turn at Union street from Main and come through Church street to the head of the common, thence down School street and around by way of Summer street to the square, and thence down Broad street to East Bridgewater.”

This debate over possible routes proved to be academic since plans for bringing trolleys to Bridgewater were again delayed. The failure to move forward on this project in 1895 was undoubtedly a disappointment for James Cushing Leach, one of the company’s directors, who as a senator representing the town in the Massachusetts General Court secured legislation in June which allowed a street railway a year in which to obtain a franchise and lay its tracks. His death in early October, following an illness of several months, meant that he would not see the trolleys on the streets of his native town. Hopefully, the building of the Broad Street railroad depot in 1893-94, a project to which he had contributed greatly, had brought him a great deal of satisfaction.

In what was becoming an annual event, another public hearing concerning the establishment of a trolley system in Bridgewater was held in the Town Hall on Saturday afternoon, April 5, 1896, a time that

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53 BL, May 4, 1895.
allowed many citizens and “interested parties” to attend. At this meeting, a new group, which was not yet permanently organized, representing Brockton, Bridgewater and Taunton interests, presented a new proposal for a network of electric railways. As in previous hearings, the Bridgewater selectmen were asked to support that part of the trolley system that would be built within their town’s boundaries, with the understanding that other communities to be served by the street cars would do the same. Bridgewater’s street railways would run on Main Street from West Bridgewater to Central Square and then continue on South Street to Pleasant Street until they reached the Bridgewater-Raynham line. After selectman Alger called the meeting to order, L. E. Chamberlain, representing the interests of the road, spent about half an hour clearly explaining the plan, arguing that, contrary to the opinion of some, the trolleys would be good rather than detrimental for local trade. Realizing that a very high percentage of Bridgewater’s population of almost 5,000 was made up of industrial workers, who could hardly “afford the luxury of a carriage or the time to travel in the way that was now provided,” he went on to stress how convenient and cheap travel by trolley would be for the “ordinary man.” A laborer, he went on to say, “could do a day’s work and then find time at a very little expense to take a little recreation with his family.” While those attending the meeting seemed to be “be heartily in favor of the new road,” some misgivings were voiced, including concerns for the beautiful shade trees on the streets where the trolley tracks would be laid and the possible loss of retail business if shoppers could easily reach larger communities like Taunton and Brockton. The matter of the route in the center of Bridgewater was again raised, with Albert J. Elwell, who owned a larger retail complex on the eastern side of Central Square, voicing his support for taking the street cars down Summer Street and up School Street to South Street. With the franchise being granted and the Brockton, Bridgewater, and Taunton Street Railway Company taking on a permanent form in late July, it was announced that work from the West Bridgewater line to Bridgewater’s Central Square would begin in early August, under a contract signed with a Mr. Coolidge from Fitchburg. This prediction, as events proved, was too optimistic, with the building of this street railway not beginning until the spring of the following year.  

By early 1897, after a decade of talk and speculation, the folks of Bridgewater were assured that they would soon be boarding trolley cars, joining inhabitants of some nearby communities which had had

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55 BI, April 11, July 31, 1896; Census of Massachusetts, 1905, p. 819.
the benefits of this new form of transportation for several years. Along with developments such as the
growth of McElwain's shoe enterprise, enlargement of St. Thomas Aquinas Church, organization of the
First Baptist Church, erection of the Odd Fellows Building, addition to the Bridgewater Academy
Building, which housed the public high school, and establishment of a Women's Prison at the State Farm,
the creation of a network of electric streets car in Bridgewater was further evidence that the depression of
the middle 1890's had run its course. On January 1, the Independent printed the responses of some
leading citizens who were asked about "ways in which the town could be improved." Most town
inhabitants would have heartedly agreed with the assertion of Reverend Elbert S. Porter, pastor of the
Central Square Church, that "the electric road ought to be built," or the comment of Charles H. King,
Bridgewater's leading photographer, that "an electric road would be a great improvement to this town."
With the creation of trolley lines to the cities of Taunton and Brockton and towns to the north, including
East Bridgewater, Whitman, and Rockland, 1897 would prove to be important year in the lives
Bridgewater's average citizens. They discovered how easily and cheaply it was to travel to other
communities, some nearby and others considerable distances away, to work, shop, visit friends and
relatives, or simply enjoy the thought of "getting out of town," on occasion. Adding to this sense of
excitement were the published reports that trolleys in the near future would also be taking folks to
communities south of Bridgewater, including Middleboro and the much larger City of New Bedford.
Indeed, the development of an intricate system of street railways between 1897 and 1900 in eastern
Massachusetts (and elsewhere in the nation) allowed more Americans to go "here and there" to an extent
not previously possible, notwithstanding the popularity of traveling by steam railroads.56

Even though the laying of the streetcar rails of the Brockton, Bridgewater and Taunton line
(hereafter cited as the B., B. & T.) could not commence until ground conditions permitted, other
important steps were taken. By late February, building materials, including a large quantity of rails, had
been purchased. A week later, it was reported that the railway company had bought from the
Bridgewater Iron Co. a lot of land on which to build an electric power plant. Located on High Street,

56 BJ, Jan. 1, June 18, 1897; "Charles H. King, Bridgewater's Up--Photographer,” Bridgewater Book; see comments
about Elwell's business block on page 9 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; in this latter
essay also see pages 20-21 on Odd Fellows Building; see page 20 concerning Saint Thomas Aquinas Church and page
16 about the First Baptist Church in my essay on churches in Bridgewater through 1910; see pages 24-26 in my essay
on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910 for comments on the growth of McElwain's business in the late
opposite the ironworks, the plans called for an engine house “75x65.4, and a boiler room 45.10x41.6.” Built with bricks from Geo. M. Hooper & Co., off Plymouth Street, the plant was equipped with “two 1000-horse power engines.” Its contractor, J. A. Grant & Co. of Boston, was required to complete work by June 16. As this project began, the B., B. & T. was negotiating with Bridgewater selectmen concerning land on which to build a car barn. A lot on Main Street, not far west of High Street, measuring, “100 feet wide and 400 feet deep,” was decided upon. The foundation walls of this structure were completed by early May. A few weeks later, its roof was finished. When the first trolley cars arrived in early June, they were housed in this building, the foundation of which can still be seen as of this writing, but most likely for not much longer.57

On April 1, ground was finally broken for the construction of electric street railways through Bridgewater, seven years after this project was first suggested. For the next three months, many in the town, in particular residents of Pleasant, Main, and the section of South Street to Pleasant, were able to watch the laying of the rails, hoisting of the poles made of North Carolina pine, and stringing of the trolley wires as street car tracks began to connect Bridgewater’s Central Square with Raynham and West Bridgewater. The Independent, taking note of the great interests in the project, rhetorically and jokingly asked its readers if they had noticed “the number of our residents who were ‘bossing the job’ on the streets.” When work on the Main Street-Central Square curve began in early June, the paper reported that there “were forty-four men in the gang and …twenty-six watching them.” For those townsfolk who were not able to view first-hand the building of the new transportation system, this local weekly’s informative columns called “Trolley Trifles” kept them abreast of how things were going. While including a certain amount of minutia, these reports are still the best way to follow the progress of this important transportation undertaking. After all, commented this newspaper, “The trolley is no trifle.”58

Among the more serious comments in these accountings were those dealing with the Italian immigrants, whose labor proved to be of paramount importance in the construction of the street railways in Bridgewater and surrounding communities. It appears that contractors of the project relied on

1890’s.
57 Bl, Feb. 26, March 5, 26, May 7, 28, June 4, 1897; Greene, Horses at Work, p. 188; as this author points out, the trolley lines had a central source of power, unlike the steam railways and automobiles; for a discussion of Hooper’s brick yard see pages 9-10, 21, 33, and 62-63 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910.
58 Bl, April 2, May 26, June 4, 1897; “Twenty Years Ago,” Bl, April 3, 1908; D. Moore, Images of America.
padrones to secure needed workers among the increasing number of Italian immigrants who began to land at American ports of entry, including Boston, in the 1890’s. While the workforce included local men, the two hundred or so Italians, most of whom who arrived in Bridgewater on the steam railroad and had not yet become American citizens, did the bulk of the hard labor, especially the laying of sixty feet long rails weighing 1,000 pounds each. On occasion, the Independent referred to the Italians workers as “Dagoes,” a disparaging word used to describe persons of Italians or Spanish birth or descent. More often than not, these hard-working immigrant laborers were simply called Italians, perhaps to distinguish them from workers who were English-Yankee or Irish, the two ethnic groups making up most of Bridgewater’s population in the 1890’s. It is not difficult, however, to detect some prejudice when the Independent, commenting on the arrival of twenty more Italian laborers, asked its readers: “Did you notice them as they came from the stations with their bed, & c., on their backs. Do you think they are desirable citizens?”

It could be that some Italians doing the demanding physical labor required in building the streetcar network were glad to be gainfully employed. But the conditions under which they labored must have been very discouraging for many of them. Those who were housed in the old Pratt Tavern on the corner of Pleasant Street and Swift Avenue could hardly have found their accommodations adequate. Built in 1779, this structure, once a stopping point for passengers using the stagecoach between Taunton and Bridgewater, was in poor condition by the late nineteenth century, offering, one suspects, few even ordinary amenities, such as piped water, electricity, or modern plumbing. One thing is sure, given the number of workers employed in the railway project, conditions must have been crowded in this old building. Many complaints from the people in the neighborhood of Pratt Tavern about the “depredations” of the Italian workers began to be heard shortly after the railway project began. The Italians also had their own reason to complain, namely their unfair treatment concerning wages. On their first pay day, they discovered that they received $1.25 a day as opposed to $1.50 given to the other workers doing similar work. The Independent seemed happy to report that the “Italians were not satisfied but no serious trouble occurred.” (I am reminded at this point of a book written in 1964 about Bridgewater, p. 39; the explanation in the picture of this last source was written by Benjamin A. Spence. 59 BI, March 19, April 9, July 23, 1897; Census of Massachusetts, 1905, Vol. I, p. 335; very few Italians resided in Bridgewater in the 1890’s, and even in 1905 they only numbered, including foreign and native born, about 300; this would change greatly in the following decades with Italians becoming a large and important part of the Bridgewater community.)
immigrant labor by Carl Wittke, We Who Built America.\textsuperscript{60}

By the end of May 1897, it was predicted that in about three weeks the B., B. & T. would be in operation, an event, averred the Brockton Times, that “will be a bigger one in this locality than the battle of Bunker Hill and the Charleston annual celebration of that event.” Many folks in Bridgewater would have agreed with this boast and were pleased to see that Isaac Damon, one its of citizens, who had been among the first Trustees of the Bridgewater Savings Bank when it was organized in 1872 and had gone on to play an important managerial role in the Bridgewater Iron Company, was put in charge of the railway’s central office, first located in Bridgewater to the “rear of Casey’s shaving parlor” on Main Street. That this transportation system had cost $450,000 to build was of interest to some citizens, but most took greater note that the cars were scheduled to run at least every hour, with the fares from Bridgewater to Brockton and Raynham set at ten cents and from Bridgewater to Taunton at fifteen cents. For riders going to West Bridgewater or the Scotland section of Bridgewater, only five cents was required. Law-abiding citizens of Bridgewater and Raynham, two communities among many in the Bay State that had adopted a policy of no liquor licenses, were also glad to hear the road’s management, aware of the potential problem of inebriated passengers riding the trolleys, was already co-operating with the authorities “to suppress the sale of liquor,” especially by several parties in Raynham who reportedly planned “to run road houses in that town for the illegal sale of liquor.”\textsuperscript{61}

On Monday, June 14, 1897, the first trolleys made their way through Bridgewater. Four days later, the Independent, noting that the last car on Thursday evening from Taunton to Bridgewater had carried ninety-one passengers, declared: “The electrics are all the rage.” But the paper’s coverage was balanced, reporting also that the last car on Wednesday evening had run “off the track at Raynham and it was past four a. m. when it finally reached its destination.” It would appear that first week’s trips between Bridgewater and Brockton were made “without a hitch.” Especially pleasing to Bridgewater patrons of the B., B. & T. was a trolley schedule allowing them to travel every half-hour to either of their

\textsuperscript{60} BI, April 2, 9, 1897, Aug. 7, 1903; HH, p. 139; Pictorial History, 1987, p. 37; Crane, p. 818; from the 1880’s until 1896 the Pratt Tavern was owned by Francis D. King, who operated a livery stable in Central Square from 1865 to 1883 to the rear of the Masonic Building on the western side of Central Square and for the following thirteen years to the rear of the Bridgewater Inn on the eastern side of the Square.

\textsuperscript{61} BI, May 28, June 4, 18, 1897; Bridgewater Book; for more about Isaac Damon see pages 12-14 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910; see page 32 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910 for further comments on the issue of liquor licenses in Bridgewater.
two larger neighboring communities. Riders looking for a quicker trip might have been a bit disappointed since frequent stops along the way and trolley speeds averaging between ten and twenty miles an hour made for rather leisurely journeys (at least by today’s standards) from Bridgewater to Taunton and Brockton. 62

About a month after the “electrics” made their debut in Bridgewater, the town’s elation was tempered by what it considered to be ill-treatment by the B., B. & T. street railway company. In celebrations at Nippenickett Pond marking the opening of the trolley system, Bridgewater rightly felt that its contribution to this transportation endeavor was ignored. Neither the Bridgewater selectmen, who were only belatedly asked to attend, nor other local friends and supporters of the project were represented in the day’s proceedings. Hardly politic on the part of the company’s board of directors, it illustrated a tendency to ignore the feelings and interests of an individual community when managing an inter-communal enterprise. Reflecting the displeasure of many of the town’s 5,000 inhabitants, one observer declared that never “before in her history, perhaps, has the old town of Bridgewater seen within her borders the completion of a more important enterprise that has just been celebrated -- by outsiders.” 63

Despite this initial snub, the trolleys within weeks of their advent were playing an important role in the town’s social and economic life. Notwithstanding urgings from the Independent to shop locally, some folks in Bridgewater quickly realized how easy it was to reach Taunton and Brockton, to take advantage of more numerous and larger stores. Others soon discovered that trolleys allowed them to work in these larger communities and, at the same time, enjoy the ride each way. Streetcars also permitted laborers from Bridgewater and other places to commute more easily to such establishments as McElwains shoe factory. Adding to the use of the “electrics” were the many townsfolk who could now spend a lovely day at the scenic area of Nippenickett Pond, a trolley stop only five miles from Bridgewater’s Central Square on the way to Taunton. In what would become a tradition, some of the eight churches began choosing this location for their annual picnic. Reserving “one or more” cars for

62 BI, June 18, 1897; “Ten Years Ago,” BI, June 14, 1907; “Twenty Years Ago,” BI, July 27, 1917; Pictorial History, 1994, p. 26; Jackson, “The Electric Street Cars,” Readers Companion to American History, p. 884; perhaps the latter author’s description of a streetcar might be helpful to some of my readers: “The typical trolley resembled a nineteenth railroad car. It had metal wheels, open platforms front and rear, and large windows all around. About half the size of a modern bus, it swayed and clanged down the small railroad tracks that were especially designed for its use. With its constantly humming motor controlled by a driver in a glassed-in cubicle, the vehicle ordinarily had no front or back because it could not be turned around at the end of the line.”
July 2, the Unitarian Church, for instance, told its parishioners and their friends to gather in front of the post office, located at that time on the first floor of the Bank Building on the western side of Central Square, if they wanted a free ride to the so-called “Nip” for the annual picnic. Otherwise they had the option of taking the trolley on their own for five cents each way. For those who worried about the intellectual state of Bridgewater, the propensity for some of their fellow citizens to take a ride on an open-sided streetcar on a warm summer evening rather than visit the town library was a matter of some concern. It was predicted, however, that cooler weather would soon reverse this unforeseen trend. Thus, for several reasons, the use of the trolleys caught on immediately, prompting one principal of the road in early July to announce that fare receipts had exceeded the company’s “most sanguine expectations.”

During the second half of 1897, as travel on the B., B. & T. became more routine, its management had to deal with several matters of varying import. The riding public came to rely on the “Electric Time Table,” published each week in the Independent. While minor changes were occasionally made in the schedules, commuters could count on trolleys going to Taunton and Brockton from Bridgewater’s Central Square every half-hour from early in the morning to late at night. Those planning to attend the annual fall Plymouth County Fair at Bridgewater read with approval the line’s plans to put four new cars on the road during this three-day event. To allay any misgivings about the safety of the streetcars, Superintendent Ralph spelled out the consequences, including the possibility of dismissal, for any conductor or motorman who deviated from established rules and regulations. Beginning in late October, the conductors faced the unenviable task of preventing “intoxicated passengers” from boarding a trolley, a duty that was particularly onerous on the cars coming from Taunton, a community that except for 1900 did not join surrounding communities in banning the selling and buying of alcoholic beverages. On occasion, there were snags in the trolley schedule such as the one on Sunday morning of July 11, when “a good many cars…were kept waiting on the turn-outs” in Central Square. Perhaps concerned with the spiritual well-being of the town, the Independent, taking note of the mix-up, gently urged the B., B. & T. management to “be more careful, as someone may be delayed in attending church.” Dealing with trolley-related accidents was another concern of the streetcar railway company. Horses, still an

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important component of Bridgewater’s transportation system, were easily frightened by the sight and sound of an “electric.” In October, for instance, a wagon was badly damaged near the corner of Main Street and Central Square before its horse, badly unnerved by a trolley, could be brought under control.  

As the construction of the streetcar system to connect Taunton and Brockton with Bridgewater was set to begin in early 1897, plans were being developed to build another trolley line to the towns north of Bridgewater. “If the proper connections were made through East Bridgewater, Whitman, and the Abingtons,” Charles H. King, Central Square’s popular photographer, told an Independent reporter, “we would then be on the direct line to Nantasket Beach, which would certainly be no disadvantage.” Shortly after this optimistic comment was made, a Philadelphia syndicate, which was “virtually the same” group behind the B., B. & T. project and was showing an interest in the Hanover and Hingham roads, began its push for a Bridgewater, Whitman & Rockland Street Railway (hereafter cited as B., W. & R.). Along with other towns that would be served by such a line, Bridgewater would be expected to provide some local capital through private subscriptions and approve a charter for that part of the system within its borders, namely the few miles along Broad Street from the railroad depot to the East Bridgewater line. The power station for this line would most likely be erected in Rockland. Hearings on the petition for the privilege of laying tracks in Bridgewater were held on February 20 in the Town Hall. Robert O. Harris of East Bridgewater, “who represented the interests of the road,” made a strong case for the “proposed road,” pointing out that it would be part of a “direct route between Taunton and Nantasket Beach.” In an issue that would long plague Bridgewater, Harris, reacting to a question about the possibility of a trolley connection between the railroad depot and Central Square, thought that the company might be able to build in “a year or so” a grade crossing where Broad Street crossed the tracks of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. In the meantime, he suggested, the town might “see fit to build a temporary bridge for their benefit.”

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64 BI, June 25, July 2, 9, 1897.
65 BI, July 9, 16, Sept. 10, Oct. 15, 22, 29, 1897; Crane, pp. 805-806; Greene, Horses at Work, p. 171; in a future essay on agriculture in Bridgewater through 1910, I will discuss the Plymouth County Agricultural Society; many of those using the trolleys to attend the Society’s fair in 1897 perhaps had not anticipated that the following year would be the last time this annual event would be held on the fairgrounds along the Town River off Broad Street; in casual conversations with some of the older residents of Pleasant Street over a number of years, it was pointed to me that late Friday and Saturday nights were hardly quiet as Bridgewater revelers returned from Taunton, where particular types of beverages, not legally available in Bridgewater, could be imbibed.
66 BI, Jan. 1, 15, Feb. 12, March 5, 1897; “Charles H. King, “Bridgewater’s Up-To-Date Photographer,” Bridgewater Book.
In early May, Bridgewater, joining the other towns along the proposed route, granted the B., W. & R. a franchise to lay tracks on Broad Street from the railroad station to the East Bridgewater line. With gangs of Italian workers again being called upon to do the heavy labor, this latest transportation enterprise moved rapidly forward in the summer, shortly after the completion of the B., B. and T. Since Bridgewater’s part of the line was less than two miles, far fewer residents were able to watch the construction activities from their front yards than had been the case in the recent laying of the rails along South, Pleasant, and Main Streets. The very heaviest cable wires were used on this latest electric car route and, by August, 450 workmen were employed in three gangs. By the fall, Bridgewater residents were able to consult their local newspaper for the schedule of the B., W. & R., noting with satisfaction how frequently cars ran between 6 a. m. and 9:35 p. m. Some attendees of the Plymouth County Agricultural Society’s fair on September 15-17 most likely were disappointed that the trolley shuttle from Central Square to the railroad depot was not yet in operation, since it meant a longer walk to the society’s grounds off Broad Street. It was not until a month later that Bridgewater’s selectmen voted to allow the B., W. & R. to lay tracts for this connection, something that was accomplished in following year. In the meantime, there continued to be rumors that the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroad and the B., W. & R. street railway companies might join forces in constructing on Broad Street an overhead crossing for the steam railroad, relieving the Bridgewater patrons of this streetcar line from crossing the railroad tracks on foot to reconnect with the trolley headed to East Bridgewater and beyond. This project was never undertaken, mainly due to a disagreement between the two companies concerning the cost of the undertaking.67

An in-depth discussion of the various trolley lines that served Bridgewater, either directly or indirectly, and the complex matter of corporate control and ownership from 1898 through 1900, including that of the construction company of James F. Shaw and a syndicate headed by J. P. Morgan, are not within the purview of this essay. A few salient points about this transportation system and its impact upon the town are worth making, however. Within a year of its opening, the B., B. & T. became Bridgewater’s largest tax payer, its assessment of $1,796.26 surpassing the $1,458.85 paid by the Bridgewater Iron Co. By the spring of 1898, Bridgewater commuters could reach Taunton and Brockton

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67 BI, March 26, May 14, July 23, Aug. 6, 20, Sept. 3, Oct. 15, 29, Dec. 24, 1897; D. Moore, Images of America;
Plymouth County Agricultural Society — The original purchase of land from the Town River to High Street was made in 1856. The

Plymouth County Agricultural Grounds, Broad Street 1890.
in about forty minutes. Of special note in the summer of that year was the completion of the “connecting link” between the Broad Street railroad depot and Central Square, a franchise for which had been granted to the B., W. & R. the previous October. The space between the rails and two feet on each side of them was macadamized. Passengers headed toward East Bridgewater or returning to Bridgewater’s center on this line were obliged to cross the steam railroad tracks on Broad Street by foot before boarding another “electric” to continue their journey. Perhaps patrons overlooked this inconvenience by the decision of the N.Y., N. H. & H. not to charge them a nickel to walk across its tracks. Even more importantly, the street car “rails at Crane & Burrill’s corner” (Summer and Broad Streets) were so laid that cars could “run either to Brockton or Taunton without the inconvenience of changing the trolley.” (Not having much impact, if any, on its Bridgewater ridership, the B., W. R. was turned over to the Rockland & Abington streetcar line toward the end of 1898).  

Two other street car lines, whose rails did not run through any part of Bridgewater, were also serving the needs of some citizens by 1898. Instead of taking the B., B. and T. to Brockton, it was possible to ride on the B., W. & R. as far as East Bridgewater and then reach the Shoe City by using the streetcars of the East Bridgewater & Brockton. More exciting for some riders was the completion of the Taunton and Providence (T. & P.) electric road in late June, making it possible to go from Bridgewater to the Rhode Island capital for forty cents by using this line and the B., B. and T. The significance of this connection was underlined by the large contingent of important Bridgewater business and political leaders who on September 9 attended the ceremony in Taunton marking the formal opening of the T. and P.  

As the B., B. & T. began operations in June of 1897, plans for an electric road between Bridgewater and Middleboro, two towns already connected by a steam railroad line, were being seriously considered. To carry out this project, a company was formed with the aim of building a trolley line from

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Bridgewater, p. 40.  
69 BI, July 9, 1897, July 1, 8, 15, Aug. 19, Sept. 9, Nov. 11, 1898; “Ten Years Ago,” Aug. 21, 1908; it would appear that the streetcar connection between East Bridgewater and Brockton was completed in the early summer of 1897; D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, p. 39; the description under the picture in this latter source was written by Benjamin A. Spence; the following Bridgewater men attended the T. & P. opening ceremony: Zeno Benson, H. D. Packard, George A. Turner, Henry L. Crane, Robert C. Breck, Robert J. McNieland, Thomas W. Crocker, John M. Stetson, J. H. Fairbanks, Henry J. Miller, William Bassett, Charles R. Crane, Stillman Alger, and R. D. Dudley; all of these men were important figures in the civic and economic life of the town at the time and, hopefully, the readers of
the N. Y., N. H. & H. railroad station on Broad Street in Bridgewater to the Middleboro depot, via North Middleboro. The biggest shareholders were not from Bridgewater, but among the company’s directors were Thomas W. Crocker and John M. Stetson, two of the town’s well-known businessmen. As it turned out, this electric road was not built under the aegis of the Bridgewater and Middleboro Street Railway Company, but instead became a section of a larger line known as the New Bedford, Middleboro and Brockton Street Railway Company (N.B., M. & B.), a corporation formed in February of 1898, with an initial capitalization of $325,000. Bridgewater’s part of this longer route was to run from Middleboro to the intersection of Pleasant and South Streets, where passengers could then get to Brockton or Taunton by using the B., B. & T. Somewhat chagrined over the omission of “Bridgewater” in the new corporation’s name, the town, nonetheless, granted the franchise for that section of the road within its boundaries, a distance that traversed almost the entire length of South Street. Nearly all of the abutters of this thoroughfare favored the route, showing a willingness to donate land so that project might go forward. Other than the possibility that a new Titicut bridge spanning the Taunton River on Green Street between Bridgewater and Middleboro might be necessary to accommodate the weight of the streetcars, it was predicted that Bridgewater would bear “very little expense … on account of the building of this road.” Townsfolk looked forward to riding streetcars on “a favorite and enjoyable route to the many summer places and resorts along the line….” That they did not get this opportunity in 1898 had nothing to do with the Bridgewater part of the thirty-two and half mile streetcar route to New Bedford. Readers of the Bridgewater Independent were aware that for a number of reasons this large city, the southern terminal of the proposed road, had been dilatory in granting the franchise approving that section of the road within its boundaries.70

With New Bedford finally agreeing to take part in the streetcar project, work on this trolley line started in the spring of 1899. Confidently assuring its readers, the Independent wrote on March 3: “We are frequently asked lately when the proposed New Bedford, Middleboro & Brockton electric road would be built. We are now glad to be able to state that it will commence in Bridgewater as soon as the weather permits….” Anticipating the start of construction, the company set up headquarters in the stable on the

70BI, June 18, 1897, Feb. 18, March 18, April 1, June 3, 10, 17, July 8, 15, 22, Aug. 12, Sept. 9, Oct. 21, Nov. 18, 25, Dec. 23, 1898; “Ten Years Ago,” BI, March 20, 1908; Moore, Tales Around the Common, p. 4.
western side of Central Square, a facility which had been run by Francis D. King between 1865 and 1883, before he moved his business to the eastern side of Central Square. With the goal of running cars between Bridgewater and Middleboro by May 1, laying of the tracks was scheduled to begin in early April. To accommodate the weight of the tracts and trolleys, the decision was made to strengthen the Titicut Bridge rather than build a new one over the Taunton River; although plans for a modern steel span were still being considered by both towns. Also of paramount importance was the granting of a contract for building the power house in Middleboro, just over its border with Bridgewater. 71

It soon became apparent that the streetcar connection between these two towns would not be in service by sometime in May. With forty-five men and twelve teams of horses on the Bridgewater end of the route and over one hundred men with teams on the Middleboro end, the goal had been to lay the rails on South Street during the first week of April. A delay in the arrival of a new kind of steel fishplate to lap butt joints, thereby preventing the rails moving up and down as the cars pass over them, was the first problem encountered. Around the same time, Bridgewater’s Superintendent of Streets Robert J. McNeeland felt compelled to temporarily halt work on South Street “because tracks were about to be laid …ten feet nearer the macadam road than the location granted by the franchise” approved by the town’s selectmen. This action led many Italian laborers, still derogatorily labeled “Dagoes,” to return to Boston, where they informed “all of their countrymen that there was no work” to be had in Bridgewater, making it temporarily “impossible for the construction manager to hire help….”. While deeming McNeeland’s action as “very” proper, the Independent lamented: “Thus it is, that a little matter like a few feet, one way or another in the highway, stops the employment of hundreds of men.” Adding to these building delays was another labor problem in early May. Complaining that their padrones were not providing “satisfactory” food and demanding “ten cents more a day,” the Italian workers in the construction gangs on the Bridgewater end of the line went on strike, an action not supported by their French Canadian co-laborers. Within a matter of days the ten cent wage increase was granted by the N. B., M. & B. It was now optimistically predicted that in all “probability …cars would be running to Middleboro by the 15th.” 72

This date came and went without the road being completed. Nevertheless, as the project

71 BI, March 3, 10, 24, April 7, 21, 1899.
proceeded, anyone taking a trip down South Street to the Titicut Bridge would have been impressed by the improvements made to this thoroughfare. Of special note was “the making of the railway bed to comply with the street,” thus avoiding uneven drainage plaguing Pleasant and Main Streets where the tracks of the B., B. & T. line were higher than the street surface. Thanks to co-operation between the abutters of South Street, including Robert C. Breck, James F. Leach, and L. B. Smith, and the street railway company, travelers would have noticed the widening of the street, the removal of nearly “all of the brush, briers and bushes …from the fences,” and the construction of new stone walls. At the corner of South and Green Streets the tracks led to the Titicut Bridge. Hardly a bright spot on the route, this span was only wide enough to accommodate the streetcar rails and a team of horses.  

Finally on June 16, the Independent was able to write: “The first regular car on the N.B., M. & B. left Bridgewater this morning at six o’clock. These cars will run hourly, leaving Casey’s waiting room, [part of Richard J. Casey’s ice cream-newspaper-variety store which this well-known Bridgewater barber had established in 1897] on Broad Street, every hour. Cars will also leave Middleboro on the hour.” To compensate Bridgewater for the loss of the B., B. & T. business office to Brockton in late July (and perhaps to assuage those still smarting from the omission of Bridgewater in the N. B., M. & B.’s official title), this streetcar line moved its business operations to the rooms over Casey’s store, the same quarters just vacated by the B., B. & T. From the outset, this trolley connection did a brisk business in both directions, not only carrying individual passengers but also conveying groups in special cars, such as the one that carried members of Bridgewater’s Pioneer Lodge of Odd Fellows on August 4 to Middleboro, where they attended the funeral of Ephraim Tillson, an active member of this fraternal organization and a mover in the construction of Odd Fellows block in Central Square two years earlier.

Despite the completion of this part of the N. B., M. & B. trolley road, the issue concerning the safety of the Titicut Bridge between Bridgewater and Middleboro over which the streetcars passed continued to be debated. Located on Green Street (some said South Street), this span, crossing the Taunton River not far from Sturtevant Corner where South and Green Streets met, had been built in 1835,

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72 BI, April 7, 21, 28, May 5, 1899.
73 BI, May 19, 1899; for those readers with an overwhelming desire for more details concerning the changes made on South Street see this last entry; hopefully in a future essay I will discuss the significant contributions McNeeland made to The Town of Bridgewater as its Superintendent of Streets between 1899 and 1918.
74 BI, June 16, Aug. 4, 1899; “Casey, Richard J., 1865-1822--Merchant,” HH, p. 258; for more about Casey see pages
replacing one dating back to 1755. A week after the trolleys began to cross the Titicut Bridge, it was reported that it had already settled eight inches and could not handle the extra weight of the streetcars. Evidently, passengers at this point found it safer to walk across the bridge and re-board the cars on the other side of the river. This practice most likely ceased after the streetcar company in early July, giving “up hopes” for a new bridge at this point, re-enforced the existing structure with two large iron girders.  

By this time, building a new bridge had become a matter of political contention in Bridgewater. At a Town Meeting on June 24, attended only by about twenty voters, it soon became apparent that there was opposition to the following article: “To see if the town will vote to authorize the Selectmen to borrow such a sum of money as is sufficient to meet one-half the expense of constructing a new bridge over the Taunton River at Green Street, under the direction of the County Commissioners.” Those opposed to taking any action on the resolution, while aware of the strain placed on the existing bridge as heavy street cars passed over it, not only had concerns about the town’s share in financing the project, but, in addition, felt that the selectmen, Zeno Benson, Harrison D. Packard, and George A. Turner, all of whom supported the article, had not fully consulted or represented the people of the town in the matter of building a new iron bridge. Evidently aware of moves toward consolidation of streetcar lines in Massachusetts, William S. Prophett, Bridgewater’s leading funeral director, felt it “a shame for honest taxpayers to have to build a bridge for the Morgan syndicate on account of the lax attention and want of ability on the part of the selectmen…” Taking umbrage with this accusation, Selectmen Packard, commenting on the need for a new bridge, retorted: “the selectmen have supported the town every time, and that’s all we have got to say about it.” Whatever the merits of both sides, the meeting ended with a vote to postpone indefinitely action on the article.  

In late July, town voters gathered again, this time to react to the Plymouth County Commissioners’ formal order for a steel new bridge over the Taunton River at Titicut, “to be completed within ninety days.” Indicative of the increasing concern about this matter, around two hundred citizens made their way to the Town House, twenty times the number of attendees of the previous gathering.
Principal Albert G. Boyden of the Bridgewater Normal School “kindly consented” to serve as the moderator, following the refusal of several other important citizens. While the warrant’s article did not specifically mention the funding issue, Selectmen Benson made it clear that Bridgewater and Middleboro would be expected to pay $5,000 each toward the undertaking. The initial hopes of securing $1,500 from Plymouth County had evaporated, owing to its heavy expenses associated with a coastal storm the previous November, described as the fiercest since 1851. With trolleys already crossing the existing structure, financial support from the N. B., M. & B. was also more than problematic. Reflecting the earlier meeting, the discussion centered around the need and cost of a new bridge and whether or not the selectmen had served the town well in drawing up the original franchise and negotiating with all the parties for a new bridge. Following a lengthy debate, a “good amount” of which was not germane to the main issues, it was voted to petition the County Commissioners to revoke their order, a procedure which the opponents of a new bridge realized was the “proper way” of attaining their goal.\textsuperscript{77}

Shortly after this meeting, a large number of Bridgewater citizens and a few from Middleboro took it upon themselves to inspect the Titicut Bridge. One of them averred that it was “merest bosh” to suggest that the existing crossing was unsafe, no doubt inferring that it was able to accommodate the streetcars. In the meantime, Edwin Josselyn, perhaps the most vocal opponent of a new bridge at both town meetings, began to circulate a petition requesting the County Commissioners to revoke their order. When asked about its position, the \textit{Independent} on August 18 wrote somewhat vaguely: “We are for a new bridge under favorable restrictions and conditions, but believe the time has not yet arrived when it can be built to advantage.” It went on to suggest that “the structure should be repaired and new railings added which would make it equal to the two bridges below it in the same line of road.” Evidently the county did revoke its order, and the 1835 Titicut Bridge, hopefully with adequate maintenance and repairs, continued until the 1920’s to accommodate various forms of transportation, including the trolleys.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{BI}, Dec. 2, 1898, July 28, Aug. 4, 11, 1899; for more about the role played by Boyden and other members of the Normal faculty in the civic life of Bridgewater see pages 78 and 80-85 in my essay on education in Bridgewater through 1910; having long been interested in weather, I hope to write at some point about some of the major storms experienced by Bridgewater and their impact on the town, including its trolley system.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{BI}, Aug. 11, 18, Oct. 7, 1899, Dec. 5, 26, 1924, March 13, 1925; as we shall see in a subsequent essay on transportation, a new Titicut Bridge was completed in December of 1924, but was located forty feet south of the old
As the matter of Titicut Bridge was being discussed, folks in Bridgewater keenly awaited the completion of the N. B., M. & B. line between Middleboro and New Bedford. In the middle of August, the work was “progressing slowly,” with about four miles of rails yet to be laid. On Saturday, September 9, the connection was finished, an accomplishment celebrated on Sunday by band concerts at Lake Nippenickett in Bridgewater and at Lakeside Park in Lakeville. Starting on Monday, riders from Bridgewater could now use the streetcars to reach New Bedford, already known as the Whaling City.

From the onset, there was “heavy traffic” on this trolley line, with cars leaving “Bridgewater at 6:20 a.m., then 20 minutes past every hour until 10:20 p.m.” Thanks to the opening of this “electric” road, the small community of Bridgewater, with a population of around 6,000 as the dawn of a new century approached, could count on more than adequate transportation provided by three major trolley companies with rails within the town and by connections these lines had with other streetcar companies in surrounding communities in all directions.\(^{79}\)

During the three years after the “electrics” made their debut in Bridgewater in June of 1897, their use became routine for many citizens. Central Square was a bustling place as the frequently-scheduled trolleys carried people to and from the village center for fares averaging ten to fifteen cents. The cars, as the trolleys began to be called, ran on narrow tracks, were about the size of a modern bus, and had motors that constantly hummed. A sure sign that winter was on its way was the switch to closed cars and the bunkering of open ones, so much enjoyed in the warm weather, in their winter quarters. Whatever the season, town inhabitants now found it easier to work, shop, and visit, for any number of reasons, communities near and far, small and large. It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of the electric streetcars in shaping both public and private life in Bridgewater during the waning years of the nineteenth century.\(^{80}\)

Although privately owned and operated, the trolley lines, in particular the B., B. & T., from the start played an indirect but important role in the town’s civil activities. In 1900, for the fourth year in a

\(^{79}\) BI, Aug. 19, 1898, June 23, Aug. 18, Sept. 8, 22, 29, Oct. 6, Nov. 3, Dec. 8, 1899, Jan. 12, 1901; D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, p. 39; the description under the picture in the last source was written by Benjamin A. Spence; Census of Massachusetts, 1905, Vol. I, p. 819.

\(^{80}\) BI, April 28, June 30, Aug. 4, Sept. 1, Oct. 6, Nov. 10, 1899, Sept. 21, 1900; Jackson, “Public Transportation,” Reader’s Companion to American History, p. 884.
row, the B., B. & T. was Bridgewater’s highest taxpayer. Its payment of $1,580.50, more than double that of its nearest rival, the Bridgewater Foundry, Machine & Rolling Mill Co., was a substantial contribution to Bridgewater’s budget of around $38,000 and one reason for the town’s low tax rate, especially when compared to some close-by communities. Another public service provided by the streetcar companies, while not completely altruistic, was providing reduced fares to the students of some outlying parts of the town who attended High School and the Model School of Bridgewater Normal, both located in the village center. Financed in part by the town’s school committee, “thirty school books” of tickets were “sold at the electric road headquarters” on September 9, 1898. Around the same time, the poles carrying the streetcar wires on Pleasant Street also proved advantageous to the town by being used for electric light wires after the old poles for this purpose were deemed “a source of danger” and ordered removed by the selectmen. One other civic contribution of the trolley companies serving Bridgewater was their policy of allowing firemen, policemen and letter carriers in performing their professional duties to use the electric cars without paying fares. Beginning in 1898, however, state law forbade this privilege being granted to “any officer of city, town, county or state” governments, lest they become obligated to the corporations that owned and operated the streetcar lines. (A statute prohibiting legislators from accepting steam railroad passes had already been enacted by the General Court.)

Another benefit of the intricate network of trolley lines in eastern Massachusetts was that it permitted fraternal, church, social, and educational organizations, including those in Bridgewater, to hire special cars to transport their members to meetings in other communities. Addressing his fellow Bridgewater high school graduates in June of 1899, Alfred V. Blackstone, son of Hollis Blackstone, Superintendent of Bridgewater State Farm and long-time member of the town’s school committee, praised the street railways for helping to “foster social and fraternal ties,” by opening “the halls of our neighboring cities to our people.” In his judgment, the Ousamequin Club, an important women’s organization founded in Bridgewater the previous year, especially owed its early success to the street railways for providing a way of establishing ties with similar women’s organizations elsewhere. On the evening of November 13, 1899, Bridgewater’s Pioneer Lodge of Odd Fellows, chartered in 1877, found it

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81 BI, Aug. 26, Sept. 9, Oct. 7, 1898, Aug. 18, 1899, Aug. 10, 24, 1900, March 8, 1901; “Collector’s and Treasurer’s Reports,” Annual Town Reports, 1900, p. 58; it might be noted by way of comparison that the Bridgewater Iron Company, the predecessor of Bridgewater, Foundry, Machine & Rolling Mill Co., paid $2,000 in town taxes in 1876.
convenient to have its members conveyed by a special electric car to a meeting of the Middleboro Lodge of Odd Fellows. Similarly, it made sense for Bridgewater’s New Jerusalem Church to charter a special trolley on December 21 to transport its parishioners to nearby Elmwood, a section of East Bridgewater, where they took part in an evening ceremony dedicating the new parish house of this fellow Swedenborgian church.82

No attempt will be made here to “scientifically” measure the impact of the streetcar system on Bridgewater’s economy between 1897 and 1901, a topic that might be best left to cliometricians. Several obvious points, along with examples, can be made, however. There is little doubt that the availability of trolley transportation was “a powerful factor” in making the McElwain shoe company, which occupied its new factory in the summer of 1898 on what soon became Perkins Street, the town’s largest employer. Many of its workers, including those from Bridgewater and certainly many from nearby communities, traveled by trolley to reach this place of employment. “If you should be in the vicinity … of the railroad station most any morning when the employees of the McElwain shoe factory are going to work,” noted the Independent on Aug 5, 1898, “you would be surprised at the large number that come on the electrics and steam cars.” A year later, workers at the factory who made the continuous passage between Brockton and Bridgewater were pleased to hear H. B. Rogers, General Manager of the B., B. & T., announce the issuance of workmen’s books containing thirty-five rides for a grand total of $2.50. (Ah, those were the days!) There were some voices who advocated the building of a greater number of suitable tenements in Bridgewater, arguing it would save some laborers car fare and eliminate “a large amount of unnecessary trouble and time going and coming.”83

Initially, some in Bridgewater had misgivings about a trolley system, suggesting it might prove detrimental to local retailers by making it easier to shop in larger communities. And, indeed, there were shoppers, lured by ads in the Independent, who rode the trolleys to purchase goods in such stores as the James Edgar department store in Brockton. For the most part, however, the electric streets cars were a

82 Crane, p. 810; BI, June 30, Aug. 4, Nov. 10, 1899, Dec. 21, 1900; “Ten Years Ago,” BI, April 17, 1908; the Ousamequin Club has played a paramount role in the cultural life of Bridgewater for about 110 years and, at some point, I hope to write about it at considerable length.

83 BI, July 29, Aug. 5, Sept. 13, 1898, March 3, June 30, Sept. 1, 1899; for more on McElwain’s during its early years in Bridgewater see pages 24 to 27 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910; I don’t mean to disparage those historians with training in economics and in analyzing statistical data; their work has made us rethink some conclusions long held about various aspects of American history; there is a need for more historical research on
boon to local merchants, especially those located in or near Central Square. With the completion of the main trolley lines serving Bridgewater in 1899, it became much easier for townsfolk who lived on or near the upper reaches of Pleasant, South, Main, and Broad Streets to shop in the village center where the great majority of the town’s retail and service enterprises were located. Commercial establishments on the western side of Central Square, including the large dry goods business of F. N. Churchill, were particularly well situated, since the trolleys arrived and departed from this location. On September 3, 1897, Richard J. Casey, already known for his barber shop on Main Street, was quick to take advantage of the trolleys by opening to the public the B., B. and T. waiting room on Broad Street, across from the southern end of the Common. While waiting a few minutes for a streetcar, one could purchase “confections, pipes, tobacco,” and “all the daily papers....” With the completion of the streetcar rail on Broad Street between the railroad depot and the Common in June of 1898, Casey’s business became even more lucrative, as did that of Williams & Mayo, a leading grocery store on the same street, which lost no time in announcing: “ELECTRIC CARS Pass Our Door.” Already known as a favorite place for trolley parties to dine, “persons from out-of-town who go for a trolley ride” were urged in June of 1899 to make a refreshment stop at the Bridgewater Inn, located in the northeastern corner of Central Square, where its new energetic proprietor George J. Alcott opened up an ice cream parlor.84

Central Square retailers, who generally stayed open four nights a week, could count on the “electrics” for greatly swelling the ranks of those attending the summer concerts in Central Square, including band enthusiasts from nearby towns such as Middleboro. Reporting that he had sold three bushels of peanuts on the evening of July 21, 1899, one merchant opined: “If they are eating peanuts, they’re from Middleboro.” One estimate placed the crowd at 3,750 that night, helping account for the “nickels” spent on “soda water” at the “fiz-z-z-stores,” referring most likely to the Square’s two pharmacies, Cole’s and Wilcox’s. Many of those in attendance that night went home by the electric streetcars, some getting off at two stores already known for their waiting rooms for trolley patrons, one operated by Walter King on Main Street, near High and Centre, the other by W. H. H. Andrews on the

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corner of Pleasant and Prospect Streets in the Scotland area of Bridgewater.  

Transporting people to weekly band concerts was not the only contribution streetcars made to the town’s recreational life. Trolley riding immediately became a popular pastime, allowing passengers, many of whom worked long hours in the town’s factories, to escape the heat of the summer during weekday evenings and Sundays, all the while viewing the beautiful rural scenery in the vicinity of Bridgewater. Being New Englanders, many townsfolk look forward to viewing the brilliant foliage before the open cars were put to rest for the winter. For those who wanted to get the most out of trolley touring there were guidebooks, including South Shore Trolley Trips by Katharine M. Abbott, which contained “several half-tone cuts representing Bridgewater.” Since she was well-known in this town, perhaps her small volume sold well at King’s News Agency on Broad Street. For those adventurous residents who were abreast of the increasing interconnectedness of the streetcar system and had the time to indulge themselves, the following piece in the Independent on July 8, 1898, must have been most enticing: “You can now leave Bridgewater by the first car in the morning, go to Providence, then take a boat to Newport, thence via the electrics to Fall River and Taunton, and home on the B., B. and T., which makes a fine day’s trip….”

The trolley system encompassing Bridgewater and its neighboring communities by 1900 made it easier to patronize a number of parks and resorts, known for their natural beauty and recreational offerings. Situated a short distance north of Brockton, Highland Park, with its many attractions provided by the Brockton Street Railway, could be reached from Bridgewater’s Central Square in about an hour. Thanks to the N. B., M. & B., Lakeville Park, south of Bridgewater and Middleboro, was equally accessible. For those with the time and inclination for a two to three hour trolley ride, it was possible to spend a good part of a day at Nantasket Beach to the north and/or areas to the south in the vicinities of New Bedford and Cape Cod towns, such as Buzzards Bay and Onset. For many in Bridgewater, however, the most popular recreational area was the southern shore of Lake Nippenickett, which paralleled Pleasant Street and was only twenty minutes from Central Square on the B., B. and T. line to

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85 BI, March 3, 10, April 7, July 21, 1899, Oct. 5, 1900, April 28, 1905; Henry P. Sheehan took over King’s store’s in 1901; Arthur R. Tinkham bought out Andrew’s business in 1905.

86 BI, June 17, July 8, 22, 1898, July 6, 1900; for more about King’s newsstand see p. 46 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910.
Seventeen years before the electric cars started wending their way along Pleasant Street, this lake (sometimes called a pond) was described by Joshua E. Crane, a noted local historian, as a “beautiful sheet of water lying in the southwesterly portion of the town,” where sportsmen found “good shooting … around its woody slopes” and “boating upon its quiet waters…. Had he lived another twelve years, Crane, who died in 1888, the year after the creation of Sprague’s pioneering network of electric cars in Richmond, Virginia, might have noted how the popularity of this Bridgewater area had increased greatly owing to the easy access provided by trolley transportation. Beginning in the summer of 1897, individuals and groups, including those associated with churches and schools, made Pilgrim Park, a recreational facility and “green space,” located off Pleasant Street on the southern rim the lake, a favorite place for picnics, parties, dancing, and boating. My research at this point has not completely clarified the origin of the park’s name or ownership. But the Independent reported on July 2 that “the railway company are doing all they can … to make the place attractive and the result is an increased patronage for the road.” The park’s principal attraction on the eve of the July 4th was “the display of fireworks… from a float in the lake.” At the very time Pilgrim Park was formally opened, the B., B. & T. line was also negotiating to buy an establishment situated a short distance southwest of this area. Run by Timothy Buckley, a well-known liquor dealer from Taunton, it was a favorite spot for dancing even before it could be reached by the trolleys.

Pilgrim Park really came into its own in the 1898 season, with a list of fourteen attractions from June 13 to September 5 being published in the Independent on May 27, under the heading “ALL ABOARD FOR PILGRIM PARK.” Adding to the anticipation of excellent performances, ranging from pantomime to vaudeville, was the announcement of a new amphitheatre which, it was predicted, would make the park “one of the pleasure spots” for people in the general area. Evidently financed by the streetcar company, the stage of this structure and “a first class, up-to-date clam house” was built by John H. Ball, a contractor and builder who had moved to Bridgewater in 1894. As in the previous summer, the

87 BI, Sept. 8, 22, Nov. 3, 1899, July 6, 1900.
88 BI, June 25, July 2, 9, 1897, July 6, 1900, Sept. 1, 1905; Crane pp. 807-808; Pictorial History, 1994, p. 23; this latter source includes an aerial view of Lake Nippenickett; at this point I don’t know when this area began to be referred to as the “Nip;” for a bit more information on this lake, my readers, might wish to consult Mitchell’s 1840 History of Bridgewater, pages 28, 54, and pages 16 and 21 in Professor Lynn Hayden Furlong’s essay on
trolleys made it possible for organizations, such as Bridgewater’s Central Square Congregational and
Whitman’s Baptist churches, to hold their annual picnics at Pilgrim Park. One suspects that the B., W, &
R. had a hand in a little piece in the Rockland Independent citing the ride to Lake Nippenickett Lake as
one the “most delightful of the many trolley trips in this section…..” How could folks in Bridgewater’s
neighbors to the north resist a trip costing 10 to 15 cents, made possible in part by transfers issued in
Bridgewater by the B., B. & T. It was also reasonable enough for an individual in Bridgewater to take a
group of friends to Pilgrim Park on a lovely summer evening. Not known for having an extensive social
life, Samuel P. Gates, one of the town’s leading businessmen, did just that on August 3, not long after he
had spearheaded a drive to get private investors to finance a new factory for McElwain’s shoe enterprise
to replace the one consumed by fire earlier in the year. I am curious as to who was in the party and
whether or not the host treated them to supper.\footnote{BI, Dec. 14, 1895, Feb. 22, 1896, May 27, June 3, July 22, 29, Aug. 5, 12, 26, 1898, Jan.23, 30, 1914; Gates was
one of the most prominent citizens in Bridgewater from the 1870’s until his death in early 1914; his contributions are
discussed in my other essays, especially the one dealing with manufacturing in Bridgewater to 1910; for a quick
review of his life see pages 264-265 in History Highlights; also instructive are the memorial sermon and lengthy

Thanks in good measure to trolley transportation, the Bridgewater public continued to patronize
the recreational facilities at Lake Nippenickett in the summers of 1899 and 1900. How many followed in
any detail, however, the changes of managers, lessees, and owners of Pilgrim Park and Nippenicket Lake
Park, as Buckley’s establishment at some point was called, is hard to say; even this writer has found it
difficult to find or follow all the pieces of the story. It might be helpful to start with three happenings in
1898. In July, F. S. Hinds, who had leased the park from the B., B. & T., felt compelled to fire Joe
Bassett, “the pleasant, uniformed gate tender” and member of the Bassett family that had lived on
Pleasant Street, opposite Lake Nippenicket, since the middle of the nineteenth century, for being one of
the two parties in a fist fight. The matter was settled out of court, but reopened when Hinds forgot to pay
Bassett his wages, prompting the latter to attach the gate receipts; at this point, I have no knowledge of
how this part of the episode played out legally. A second happening in August was of some import since
it confirmed the B., B. & T.’s continued interest and, indeed, say in Timothy Buckley’s establishment.
Using its leverage as Buckley’s supplier of electricity, this electric streetcar company warned him “that no
spirits or malt liquors should be sold on these grounds under any circumstances.” The trolley
company backed up this admonition by threatening to cut off the park’s electric lights if Buckley “had any knowledge” of violations to Bridgewater’s stand against liquor licenses. The third thing of note happened in November when, ironically, the lease of Pilgrim Park was purchased by Joseph E. Bassett.  

As the century was coming to an end, the B., B. & T. continued its involvement in promoting Lake Nippenichert as a recreational resort. Having decided to no longer use Pilgrim Park as a base of operations, the line purchased in April of 1899 a five-year lease of Lake Nippenicket Park, which, it will be recalled, had been started and run by Timothy Buckley of Taunton. R. A. Harrington, who had managed the Taunton opera house and the eating house at Rocky Point in Rhode Island, was hired as the park’s new manager. After putting the premises in “the best of repair,” Lake Nippenickett Park was re-opened to the public in June. Easily reached by the open-sided trolleys employed in the summer, folks in Bridgewater were soon enjoying the resort’s offerings, including “its appetizing clam bakes, its music, bowling, boating and vaudeville.” In the meantime, Pilgrim Park, now owned and operated by Joseph E. Bassett, did not fare as well. Opening for the 1899 season in May, he had boats to let and a dancing pavilion which could be rented for private social parties, but with removal of its stage, there was little “left to show where so many good entertainments” had been given. Even the pavilion was torn down in the summer of 1900. Bridgewater had not seen the last of Bassett’s enterprise, but it was apparent in 1900 that Nippenickett Lake Park, enjoying the backing of B., B. and T. street railway, had become the prominent resort on the shores of Lake Nippenickett.  

While the electric streetcars became the most popular way of getting around for many Bridgewater inhabitants between 1897 and 1901, this new form of transportation was not without its problems for the street railway companies, their patrons, and the town in general. There were various accidents involving the trolleys, some of little consequence, others with tragic results. Hardly pleasant for the riders, derailment of cars occasionally occurred, resulting mainly in schedule delays. In July of 1898, the major streetcar lines then serving Bridgewater and surrounding communities gave notice that

summary of Gates’s will found in the Bridgewater Independent.  

90 BI, July 29, Aug. 19, Nov. 11, 1898, May 31, 1901, Sept. 1, 1905, March 6, 1925; Crane, pp. 808, 830; Townscape Institute, Form 183, pp. 436-437.  

91 BI, March 17, April 14, 28, May 12, June 9, 16, 23, 30, July 14, Aug. 11, 21, 1899, June 22, 29, July 6, 21, 1900, March 6, 1925; Lord, “First Quarter of the Century in Bridgewater,” Tales Around the Common, p. 47; in the early 1920’s, Bassett’s widow, Edith, made extensive improvements in the property, restoring Pilgrim Park’s popularity; the increasing use of the automobile was a contributing factor.
they would “not be responsible for any delay or failure to make connections in any way.” Other mishaps were caused by encounters between streetcars and horse-drawn wagons, sometimes damaging the buggy and killing or wounding the horse. In some cases the encounter led the animal to run amok. Of greatest import, of course, were trolley-related accidents leading to human fatalities. On Sunday, October 29, 1899, word spread quickly that Patrick E. Keenan, a “young man who was well and favorably known in Bridgewater,” had lost his life earlier in the foggy morning of that day when his horse-drawn carriage was struck and completely demolished by “electric car No. 45,” on the corner of High and Center Streets, as it was being taken to the car barn. Attended “by a large number of the deceased ’s friends,” funeral services were held the following Tuesday at the recently expanded St. Thomas Aquinas Church on Centre Street, a short walk from the accident scene. Perhaps this tragedy prompted many citizens about a week later to sign a petition asking the Bridgewater selectmen to take steps regulating the speed of streetcars within the town limits.92

Most Bridgewater patrons of the trolleys appreciated the reasonably-priced and convenient transportation provided by street railway companies. But law-abiding citizens joined the railways in being put out by untoward behavior of some riders. Particularly vexing to all concerned were intoxicated passengers who boarded electric cars in Taunton, usually late at night on the weekend, headed to Bridgewater. Part of the problem stemmed from that city’s failure, except for 1900, to join the ranks of its neighboring communities, including Bridgewater, in opposing the issuance of liquor licenses. Within months of its opening, the B., B. & T., “considerably annoyed” by this problem, issued orders to conductors not to allow any drunks on their cars. The effectiveness of this dictate, which was re-enforced by holding the conductors responsible for the actions of offenders, is difficult to say. Drunkenness in Bridgewater accounted for the biggest number of arrests in the early 1900’s, but Patrolman’s Reports did not specify how many were made on the trolleys. In a few instances, these annual reports cited a very small number of “Disturbances on Electric Cars” as the reason for an arrest. The situation was made more complicated in August of 1898 by the possibility that some riders returning to Bridgewater might have enjoyed a beer or two at Buckley’s Nippenicket Lake Park before a police raid

“secured 118 bottles of beer ...and a number of empty bottles.” A reprieve for trolley patrons and Bridgewater’s Pleasant Street residents, tired of raucous carrying-ons as a trolley rumbled its way to Central Square, began on Monday night of April 30, 1900, when Taunton, seeing the error of its ways, closed the city’s saloons for “at least one year.”

Almost as odious as drunkenness was to many trolley patrons were the habits of smoking, spitting, and swearing of some fellow riders. Less problematic during the season of open trolleys, smoking was permitted in cold months in one special compartment in so-called “smoking cars.” Even this concession was opposed by many commuters, especially women, who, finding the smell “very disagreeable,” argued it was easy enough for “smoke to find its way to all parts of the car...” Perhaps more disgusting to some was the practice of spitting or, to use the language of that era, “expectorating” on the floor of electric cars. Some in Bridgewater called for following the lead of Brockton and Whitman in passing an ordinance against this unseemly conduct. In an era when ladies were highly offended by swearing, many patrons of the B., B. & T. must have cheered on reading or hearing the news on Sept. 9, 1898, about the ten dollar fine against one rider for swearing on a railway car. A public letter published in the Independent on August 11 of 1899, while not discussing an incident on a trolley itself, is indicative of the social unease caused by these forms of behavior as the century was drawing to a close. Describing a scene at the junction of the B., B. & T. and the N. B., M. & B. lines on the corner of Pleasant and South Streets, the author, Edward M. Alden, wrote: “On Sunday evening last, when there were thirty or forty men, women and children at this point, waiting for a Middleboro car, a most disgraceful scene occurred between two intoxicated persons, whose language was most obscene and blasphemous, and whose actions compared favorably with their words.” The rest of the letter included a plea for action by the “Town Authorities and Officers” to protect those waiting for the streetcar and “those residing in the immediate vicinity of the corner...” from “such disgusting scenes and talks.”

A consensus on preventing, or at least mitigating, unacceptable social behavior on the trolleys did not rule out problems in the relations between the streetcar lines and the Town of Bridgewater. On

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HH, pp. 73, 181.

BI, Oct. 22, 1897, Aug. 19, Dec. 13, 1898, May 4, 1900; “Patrolman’s Report,” Annual Town Report, 1904, p. 45; Bridgewater’s police report for 1898 indicates that out of fifty-one arrests thirty were for drunkenness; at some point, I hope to write an essay on law and order in Bridgewater during the early twentieth century; part of this story will deal with the creation of a formal Police Department and the appointment of a Police Chief.
occasion, complaints were heard about a railway line supposedly violating the franchise allowing it to operate in the town. By early July of 1898, for example, a number of citizen were perturbed that a crossing in Central Square had remained impassable for three weeks after the B., B. & T. had torn it up to put in a turnout for its streetcars. Within a week, the road indicated the matter would be taken care of and, in addition, announced plans to finish macadamizing the areas of Broad Street and Central Square adjacent to the trolley rails. In late November, following the fiercest storm to hit the coast of Massachusetts in almost a half century, a problem of a different nature marred the relations between the streetcar railways and the town. Credited with doing its best to clear the tracks of snow, the line was, nevertheless, called to task for plowing it onto the streets, making them “impassable.” Most likely aware of state legislation enacted early in the year making street railway companies responsible for clearing snow from the rails “in such a manner as may be approved by the superintendent of streets…in the city or town in which the tracts are located,” Bridgewater’s Superintendent of Streets McNeeland felt compelled to notify the line’s Superintendent Ralph that he had to remove snow from the streets (most likely Pleasant, Main, Broadway and South), where the company’s plows had pushed it. The streetcar management evidently took care of this particular matter, and the following February, after “one of the most severe” snowstorms ever known” in Bridgewater, the street railway was commended for efficiently combating the “results of the elements.”

**Electric Streetcars in Bridgewater-1901-1910**

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the railway system of electric cars, built between 1897 and 1900, was the most important mode of transportation for most folks in Bridgewater, whether traveling to other communities or places within their own town. There were, to be sure, other ways of getting around, including the use of horses, horse-drawn conveyances, steam railroads, bicycles, and motorized vehicles, most notably the automobile. None of these, however, matched the trolley in rider-ship. Whether for purposes of work, business, shopping, visiting friends and family, recreational excursions, or extended vacations, the interconnectedness of many streetcar lines permitted the town’s

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94 BI, Sept. 9, 1898, Feb. 10, April 28, Aug. 11, 1899.
inhabitants to be transported to other town and cities, near and far.\textsuperscript{96} As had been the case from the advent of trolley service, the streetcars were simply a godsend for many people in Bridgewater in the early 1900’s. Some commuter students of the Normal School, although not granted “scholar” passes by the street railway companies, found it possible to reach this Bridgewater campus to pursue their goals of becoming teachers. To help young people from some outlying districts further their education at the public high school, located in the Academy building in Central Square, the town subsidized their use of the electric cars. Workers, including those in retail establishments and factories, also relied on this form of transportation to reach their places of employment. Even those who did not ride the trolleys applauded the state legislature’s decision in 1901 to allow the street railways to carry mail and newspapers. Not only pragmatic reasons prompted the use of this relatively new mode of travel. Spending a relaxing day at the “Nip” was now something to which most townspeople could look forward. Breathing in the delightfully fresh air of a late spring Sunday as newly-opened cars wended their ways through the surrounding country-side was well worth the fare of ten to twenty cents. Viewing the brilliantly colored foliage in the autumn, particularly from the streetcars between Bridgewater and Taunton, was an aesthetic experience indeed, one that Joshua E. Crane, Jr., must have experienced many times as he commuted to work as the head of the public library in that community. Even those watching the frequent comings and goings of the trolleys, perhaps from a bench on the Common, were surely aware, if not always appreciative, of the increased hustle and bustle in Central Square, of this small and quiet town with a population by 1910 approaching 8,000, including over 1,000 “residents” of Bridgewater State Farm. Adding to this activity, as pointed out previously, were the folks from other communities who traveled to Bridgewater on the trolleys to visit, work, shop, attend a regional fraternal or religious gathering, or join the locals in the wholesome, or perhaps less wholesome, offerings of the “Nip.” In late November of 1903, it was deemed newsworthy enough to report that Mrs. Lucy Sawin, eighty-four years old, made a trip to Bridgewater from Worcester “by electric car, alone” to see her former schoolmate, Mrs. Martin Swift of Church Street.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{95} BI, July 8, Dec. 2, 1898, Feb. 10, 17, 24, 1899; Hennessy, Twenty-Five Years of Massachusetts Politics, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{96} BI, Aug. 23, 1901, May 9, 16, July 4, Sept. 19, 1902, Aug. 11, 1905, June 21, 1907; HH, p. 178; D. Moore, Images of America: Bridgewater, p. 39; the brief narrative under the lower picture in this last source was written by Benjamin A. Spence.
\textsuperscript{97} BI, May 17, Oct. 4, 1901, May 16, 1902, July 3, Sept. 18, Nov. 27, 1903, Sept. 9, 1904, Aug. 11, 1905, June 21,
Recognition by many Bridgewater people of the important role trolleys played in their lives was probably not matched by their knowledge of changes in ownership, control, and management of the streetcar lines that served the town. Most local patrons knew that the B., B. & T. was the first line to have electric rails in Bridgewater, making for inexpensive and relatively quick commuting to Taunton and Brockton, and that soon afterward two other companies, the B.,W. & R. and the N. B., M. & B., did the same for passengers traveling to other communities, north and south. Most local riders, however, had little awareness of the ways in which these lines from the beginning were interrelated. Local and outside investors, including those from such cities as New York and Philadelphia, had been involved in financing streetcar companies whose rails interconnected with each other and whose managements saw the benefits of granting transfers to patrons making connections from one line to another. The street railway network serving Bridgewater had been built by the James F. Shaw Construction Company, giving this outfit a stake in creating a well-integrated trolley system. This company’s hopes to own and control the entire network of trolleys in a good part of Massachusetts were challenged by a syndicate headed by John Pierpont Morgan, one of the nation’s leading financiers, who had, beginning in the 1880’s, been a leading force in the consolidation of the nation’s railroads in order do away with “inefficient management, inflated security structures, and unrestrained competition…” Some folks in Bridgewater remembered that in the early 1890’s, the Old Colony Railroad, which had served Bridgewater for many years, was one of the lines in southeastern Massachusetts that came became part of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, an enterprise controlled by the Morgan interests. Along with his associates, Morgan in the late 1890’s also sought to establish control over the individual electric streetcar companies, including those that served Bridgewater directly or indirectly. The desire to create a financially sound network of trolleys was not Morgan’s only motivation. By bringing the streetcar lines under his control, it was “generally understood” that he hoped to “checkmate the proposed scheme” of allowing them to transport goods, something the steam railroads felt to be their business.98

At the start of 1900, Bridgewater riders still found the trolley schedules listed under the headings of individual lines. But the inexorable drive toward consolidation of the Bay State’s electric streetcar

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98 BL January 27, May 12, 19, June 20, Sept. 29, 1899; Forrest McDonald, “Morgan, John Piermont,” Encyclopedia
Trolley Tracks and Poles--early 1900's
Western Side of Central Square
(Rizer Collection)
By the middle of the year, a big syndicate known as the Massachusetts Electric Co. was in the process of creating a more integrated network of street railways in eastern Massachusetts. Its aims of greater economic efficiency and more “satisfactory service” were to be realized by merging its original thirty-one companies into a smaller number of larger ones under the same management. Another sign of consolidation was the absorption in July of the N. B., M. & B. line, part of which ran from the corner of South and Pleasant Streets in Bridgewater to Middleboro, by the Brockton Street Railway. By the fall, in fact, schedules for all the lines serving Bridgewater directly appeared under the heading of this Brockton company. Still, as late as December 7, the Independent wrote: “The B., B. & T. Electric Company have put in large vestibule cars. This is quite gratifying to those who spend an hour each day going and returning from their work at Bridgewater to their homes in Raynham.”

As 1901 began, the patrons of some lines of the Brockton Street Railway Company were enjoying small reductions in fares. Opining that the decreases would not “visibly increase many of our bank accounts to a considerable sum,” the Independent, nevertheless, felt that “those obliged to use the street cars daily in going to and from their places of business” would be the “greatest beneficiaries under the new tariffs.” In the cold month of February some riders were perhaps more concerned with the lack of heat in “the little lonesome car” which transported them along Broad Street between Main Street and the railroad crossing. One innovative suggestion to the electric railway company was to install a treadmill to “keep the circulation up of those being transported…. ” The Brockton Street Railway Company as an entity would not have to respond to such requests much longer, however.

In the early spring, another major step toward consolidation was realized when this railway line joined with over thirty smaller ones in eastern Massachusetts to create the Old Colony Street Railway Company. Until 1911, Bridgewater patrons of trolley transportation would ride the streetcars of this merger, itself part of the Massachusetts Electric Company, an even larger combination of individual trolley lines. If local riders were not always happy with the services provided by the Old Colony line, the town as a whole benefited greatly from the presence of this enterprise. Until 1905, it was Bridgewater’s heaviest tax payer, contributing, for instance, $2,256.30 to the town’s treasury in 1903. Seven years

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99 BI, Jan. 12, June 1, July 20, Nov. 9, Dec. 7, 1900.
100 BI, Jan. 4, Feb. 8, 1901.
later, it no longer had this distinction, having been surpassed by the Stanley Works. Nonetheless, the Old Colony’s 1910 tax bill of $1,548.75 placed it as the second biggest contributor to the town’s coffer.\textsuperscript{101}

Not surprisingly, the cost of riding the trolleys was an important point of contention, with the commuters wanting low fares and the company wanting profits on its operations, a most logical difference between patron and company desires. In the early years of the electric streetcars, the fares were considered modest, between ten and fifteen cents, depending on the particular destination and how generous the transfer policies were. It was cheaper to go from Bridgewater to Brockton than to Taunton, even though the distance was about the same. But more people went to the Shoe city, and the line to Taunton, according to management officials, did not realize a profit. Just prior to the Old Colony takeover of the trolley system in 1901, the Brockton Street Railway, as we have noted, made some small reductions in the fares, which could have added up for the line’s regular patrons. Later in the year, the Old Colony agreed to allow iron workers, who lived in the area of Sprague Hill, at the intersection of Broad and High Streets, to ride for one fare to the iron works (which would officially become the Stanley Works in November of 1903) located at the other end of High Street, a short distance down the hill from Main Street. These commuters still had to use the Broad Street trolley shuttle from the railroad tracks to Central Square, where they boarded the streetcars headed to West Bridgewater and Brockton. In another conciliatory gesture, the Old Colony agreed in early 1905 to change the fare-collection point from the corner of Pleasant and South Streets to Central Square, an especially welcomed concession to the out-of-town laborers since it reduced the amount of walking needed to reach places of employment such as the McElwain shoe factory on Perkins Street. In the following year, the streetcar company, responding to the urgings of the Commercial Club, an organization of Bridgewater business men formed in late 1900, lowered the fares for Bridgewater citizens who labored in Middleboro by selling them books containing twenty rides for $2.10, making each ticket twelve and a half cents rather than the previous fifteen cents.\textsuperscript{102}

For many riders, these reductions did not compensate for the increases announced in early January of 1904, which raised the fare from Bridgewater to Taunton and Middleboro to twenty cents.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{BI}, June 1, 1900, April 19, 1901, Aug. 5, 1904, Aug. 27, 1909, Aug. 12, 1910, Feb. 10, July 7, 28, 1911; Abrams, \textit{Conservatism in a Progressive Era}, pp. 17, 63, 125-126, 194-196, 240; this last source does not mention Bridgewater specifically, but did help me understand a bit more the issue of consolidation of street car lines in Massachusetts during the early 1900’s.

while keeping it to Brockton at ten cents. Bridgewater inhabitants had not seen any hike in the cost of trolley service since its inception and were hopeful that the Old Colony, with its greater financial resources and better management, would even lower rates. Reflecting public concern over rising costs of trolley transportation, Robert S. Goff, general manager of the Massachusetts Electric Company, which included the Old Colony, was invited to address the Bridgewater Commercial Club on January 11, 1905. After giving a brief history of the street railways, he catalogued developments that made the rate increases imperative if the electric streetcar companies were to remain profitable, something that had become increasingly difficult for many of them in Massachusetts. Among other factors, he cited: harsh weather conditions; a recent national coal strike; increases in maintenance and operational costs; the need for heavier rails, bigger feeder lines, car fenders, and double track cars; and, not the least, a twelve and a half percent increase in employees’ wages during the previous six years. There was much truth in what Goff had to say, but the riding public surely remained skeptical and unhappy about the increases.103

After cost, adequate and on-time service, with the need to make as few connections as possible, was the most important concern of electric car riders. In the fall of 1901, about forty Bridgewater residents who worked in Brockton, “disgusted” with delays and over-crowdedness in late afternoon trolleys returning to their town, began riding the steam trains, despite the need in some cases for additional transportation to reach home from the Broad Street depot. In the same year, following a period of rather direct streetcar connection, travel between Bridgewater and Braintree became more problematic owing to additional stops and connections in East Bridgewater and Whitman. In turn, this created snags in the streetcar schedules from Bridgewater to Taunton and Providence, R. I. In an emerging regional economy, where workers might live in one place but be employed in another, lack of adherence to a tight timetable created inconveniences for those waiting for a late trolley or missing one that left early. In the fall of 1907, to cite one example, workers in Taunton returning to their homes in West Bridgewater and Brockton through Bridgewater complained that streetcars in this town’s Central Square frequently did not keep to a strict schedule. In all fairness to the Old Colony, the placing of block signals four years earlier at the turnout in Central Square and the corner of South and Pleasant Streets began to prevent some delays by allowing the cars to return to Taunton without waiting for late ones from

Middleboro to arrive. Some electric cars had been known to do this even before the installation of this new safety device, but always with possibility of a “head on collision.” In 1904, another block signal permitted trolleys entering Bridgewater from West Bridgewater to proceed to the car barn on Main Street if no signal was set against it.  

One section of the trolley system that some residents found particularly vexing was the electric rail connection between Central Square and the railroad depot on Broad Street. The need to take a small streetcar between these two points and then cross the railroad tracks on foot to reconnect with “real” streetcars heading to East Bridgewater and beyond was inconvenient, time consuming and, at times, unsafe. In the early 1900’s, there was still hope of abolishing the crossing on Broad Street by erecting a bridge for the steam railroad. This would have done away with the break in streetcar travel on this thoroughfare, eliminating the need for a special electric shuttle. Disagreements involving the town, state, and the railroad and streetcar companies over financing the project, however, continued to doom any chances of it going forward. In the meantime, riders going either direction on Broad Street between the Common and the depot continued to rely on this shuttle service, except for those hardy souls who chose to walk this route measuring about the distance of a good city block. In April of 1910, the Independent humorously made the following suggestion: “When the car starts down the hill [Broad Street] some day, take your stand at the corner of Main Street and watch it as it takes its devious way along and you will wonder whether we have in the town the old tilting board of your childhood, or the more modern thriller, the roller coaster.” In her reminiscences forty years later, Louise Dickinson Rich, who came to Bridgewater in 1905, nostalgically remembered taking this electric car just for fun, describing it as “a little bobbed-off thing like the Toonerville Trolley….” Many patrons, however, did not enjoy this noisy and bumpy ride, made even more uncomfortable in the winter by unheated cars. Hopefully, some riders in warmer weather were more sanguine about the experience, having been put in a mellow mood by consuming one of Casey’s delicious ice cream concoctions and/or reading a newspaper in his waiting room, all the while making sure not to miss the “little car” headed to the “Deep-po” and the grade crossing. Fair-minded trolley users hopefully took note of the “less ancient car” put into service by the

Old Colony in the summer of 1901 and the laying of new rails on Broad Street nine years later.  

Complaints were not limited to fares and services, although they certainly headed the list. Sometimes the “electrics” were criticized for speeding, particularly in the town’s center. Following three accidents at the junction of South and Pleasant Streets in early 1901, it was suggested that the cars move more slowly from the Square to this spot, keeping in mind that human “life was more valuable than minutes.” In 1902, the State Railroad Commission, reviewing complaints in Middleboro, issued guide lines urging trolleys in that town to abide by a speed of fifteen to twenty miles an hour, depending on the location. Some gripes voiced by Bridgewater commuters have a modern ring: blowing whistles late at night; failure of conductors to change signs; and altering schedules without prior notice. At times, simple requests were made of the Old Colony, such as a 1901 petition asking for “a shelter of some kind at the corner of Broad and High Street;” in a typical managerial reply the company promised to look into the matter. Many Bridgewater riders must have cheered when a state law in September 1905 prohibited smoking in all closed cars. Conversely, smokers must have longed for the open cars which were employed in the warm weather. In October of 1907, most likely responding to passenger grumblings, the Railroad Commission made the heating of all trolleys mandatory between October fifteenth and April fifteenth. More “respectable” citizens using the Bridgewater-Taunton line certainly applauded the Old colony’s decision in May of 1906 to have a special officer on the Sunday night trolleys, as had long been the case with the Saturday night cars. The hiring of A. Frank LeBaron, already a well-known Bridgewater police officer, would help prevent, it was hoped, a lot of trouble and annoyance on the late night trolleys returning from the “wet” community of Taunton.  

To enhance its investments and ensure the comfort and safety of its patrons, the Old Colony spent much time, energy, and money in maintaining and upgrading the trolley system between 1901 and 1910. Some tasks were routine, including painting the winter cars in the fall, repairing the roadbeds after the heavy winter snows and rains in anticipation of heavy summer traffic, responding to complaints about

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the grade crossing at the railroad station on Broad Street, or clearing the rails of piles of leaves, one of the hallmarks of the colorful New England autumns. Other projects were extensive and time-consuming, requiring a larger “gang” of laborers. In a major undertaking in the late summer of 1903, 1,300 new ties were laid on the Taunton-Bridgewater line, a part of the system hardly lucrative for the Old Colony. Two years later, a large force of workers began repairing the tracks from the junction of South and Pleasant Streets, all the way to Brockton, a project taking several weeks to complete. Responding to grade requirements established by the town’s street department, the electric car company in August 1907 employed a gang of workers to lower the tracks on South Street. In the next year, roadwork was done on a section of Main Street near Central Square, Pleasant Street in Scotland, and South Street. Upgrading equipment also had to be considered. Around Christmas in 1902, commuters between Bridgewater and East Bridgewater surely noted the much improved ride when new double track vestibule cars were used for the first time on that part of the streetcar system. Illustrating that the trolleys were indeed the “electronics,” a new cable was built in the fall of 1909 from Bridgewater to Elmwood to connect with one running to the center of East Bridgewater.107

Maintaining and up-dating this interconnected trolley system serving Bridgewater did not preclude accidents. Periodically, derailments took place, sometimes causing delays on more than one line. In the fall of 1903, streetcars left the tracks on the roads to Middleboro and East Bridgewater, interrupting service for considerable times in both instances. Two years later, a Brockton woman sustained severe bruises when a trolley to Middleboro was derailed on South Street, near the Bridgewater poor farm. Her injuries were initially taken care of by Mrs. Neil J. Deering, who, along with her husband, had been running this town institution since 1895. Derailments were not the cause of all streetcar accidents. One, which could have had more serious consequences, happened in September of 1903. A trolley from East Bridgewater, descending Broad Street on its approach to the railroad crossing near the depot, was unable to stop on rails made slippery by fallen leaves. The car hit a pole beyond the usual stopping place, resulting in fender damage and shattered panes of glass, but luckily no passenger injuries. Of greater consequence was the accident which took place on Main Street in May of 1905.

involving a rear-end collision of two electric streetcars. One of the conductors was knocked unconscious, and the trolleys were badly damaged. Passengers were shaken up, but fortunately not physically hurt. Careless or bizarre behavior by a passenger on occasion was to blame for an accident. In February of 1903, for example, one rider decided to jump off the car in front of his home on South Street without signaling the conductor. His considerably bruised face was attended by Dr. John W. O’Neil of Main Street. One of strangest incidents occurred in September of 1906, near Leach’s turnout on South Street. Before the electric could stop, it ran over the heel of a thirty-year man, who was laying, for whatever reason, on the tracks. He was treated by Dr. Calvin Pratt, who had his office on the same street, and then transported to the Brockton Relief Hospital, most likely on the trolley. More than one mishap involved a trolley and a horse-drawn conveyance of some type, still very common in the early 1900’s. It might be difficult for twenty-first century reader in Bridgewater to visualize a woman being thrown from her sleigh in the winter of 1910 as its runners caught in protruding electric rails in front of Simmons’s meat market on the corner of Main Street and Central Square. “When the horse and sleigh were righted, it was found no damage had been done,” and Mrs. William Doble of Harvard Street “was able to drive home without further mishap.”

Compared to steam railroads and automobiles, which are still important modes of transportation, trolleys had a relatively short history in Bridgewater. Only a few town residents in the early twenty-first century have distinct memories of the advantages and problems, including accidents, of the popular electric streetcar system, which provided an inexpensive way of travel between 1897 and the late 1920’s. With one major exception, the paucity of physical remains also contributes to our lack of historical awareness and appreciation of the once extensive trolley network serving Bridgewater. It is quite conceivable that laborious digging might still unearth some iron rails dating back a century or so, but the poles installed to carry the electric wires have long disappeared. The same can be said of the original power station on High Street, opposite the site of the Bridgewater iron works, and the old Pratt Tavern on Pleasant Street that housed many of the Italian workers whose labor was indispensable in building the

trolley lines in the late 1890’s. As of the writing of this essay, I am told, that the last remains of the car barn’s foundation, dating back to 1897, on Main Street, will soon be a thing of the past.\textsuperscript{109}

The prominent exception to the lack of physical remains is a medium-sized structure at the junction of Pleasant, Swift, and Birch Streets. One of a few pre-1930 brick buildings in Bridgewater, it looks a bit out of place in an area that has retained some vestiges of its rural past. Many of the town’s older residents might remember it as a Veterans of Foreign Wars post, named after James A. Oliver, Jr., the first Bridgewater soldier killed in what became known as World War One, or that in 1969 the structure was renamed for Orien L. Desnoyer, the post’s Quartermaster for thirty years. It is not widely known, however, that it was erected in 1904 as an electric substation for the Old Colony Street Railway Company.\textsuperscript{110}

In July of 1903, two years after the area’s smaller streetcar lines were consolidated under the aegis of the Old Colony, Bridgewater was chosen, along with several other communities, including Abington and Brockton, as a site for an auxiliary or “boosting” station which would be connected by main feed lines to two new big power stations, one to the north in Quincy, the other to the south in Fall River. The plan envisioned the running of lines from the original power station on High Street, near what later in that year would be officially known as the Stanley works, along Center Street to Pleasant Street where the transforming station would be built. Immediately the proposal ran into trouble. Not only did Wales Haywood, Gustavus J. Lowe, and E. S. Rhoades, owners of the land on the corners of these two streets, adamantly refused to sell their property to the Old Colony, many other town residents opposed having a transforming plant on a major thoroughfare, especially on a site so near the village center, Central Square. Visions of “incidental noise, smoke, and ash heaps” marring the beauty of Pleasant Street were conjured up in the minds of many townspeople, especially those living on this long street leading into Bridgewater from Taunton and Raynham. Adding to the distrust between the town and the Old Colony was the suspicion that rails would be laid along Center Street as the wires were extended from High Street to the

\textsuperscript{109} Readers might wish to go back to page 41of this essay for the facts on the building of the car barn and the electric power station on High Street.

\textsuperscript{110} BI, Aug. 23, Sept. 13, 1918; Townscape Institute, Form, 168, pp. 406-407; a trove of important information, this last source mistakenly writes that this structure was built “to provide a meeting hall facilities for the Veterans of Foreign Wars…;” Thomas P. Moran and The “Highlights” Staff, “Bridgewater in War,” HH, p. 136; Lord, “First Quarter of the Century in Bridgewater,” Tales Around the Common, p. 47; contrary to what Lord wrote, this sub-station was not built for the Eastern Mass. Street Railway, but for one of its predecessors, the Old Colony; I look
new “power” station. The company did not help its cause at this point by apparently refusing to consider alternate sites for its new structure.111

The matter, nevertheless, re-emerged in the spring of the following year, and this time things went differently. With the backing of the state’s railroad commissioners and legislature, including Bridgewater’s representative George A. Turner, the Old Colony was positioned to erect a “booster” station in the town. Not willing to alienate its citizens, many of whom agreed with Turner that “unnecessary obstacles” should not block the company’s efforts to provide better service, in particular the “heating of its cars,” the Old Colony disavowed any intention of laying tracts along Center Street. Most important was the decision to build the transforming plant on the corner of Swift Avenue and Pleasant Street, a location further southwest than the site proposed a year earlier. Interestingly enough, the new site was where the old Pratt Tavern had been used a few years earlier to house Italian workers who labored diligently to lay the trolley tracts. By the time the Old Colony showed an interest in building a booster station at this location, the inn no longer existed, its 120 year history having come to an end when it was dismantled by Charles A. Smith in the late summer of 1898. In 1904, the streetcar company bought the lot on which the Inn had stood from Martin Swift Jr., who had purchased the property a year earlier from the heirs of the estate of Francis D. King, best known for conducting a livery stable in Central Square from 1865 to the 1890’s.112

Designed in the Georgian Revival style of architecture, construction on this sixty by thirty feet booster station began in June, at a projected cost of $3,000. Based on facts and figures supplied by W. B Edwards, who was in charge of building the substation, the following description by the Independent might be helpful to my readers as they walk or ride by this century-old structure: “The materials for the building are sand-struck red brick, laid in red mortar, one belt course of granite, flat arch windows, with

forward to saying more about James A. Oliver Jr. in an essay about Bridgewater and the Great War of 1914-1918. 111Bl., July 3, 24, Aug. 7, 21, 1903, March 5, 1915, May 23, Oct. 17, 1924; No author given., “Street Railway System in Bridgewater,” found in the files of Bridgewater’s Public Library; at this point in my research I cannot confirm this last source’s assertion that the original power station on High Street became the Jenkins Mill; several items in the Bridgewater Independent between 1915 and 1924 do indicate that the old power plant on High Street was renovated to house businesses engaging in manufacturing ordinary leatherboard and shoe heels, but does not include the Jenkins enterprise among the companies mentioned; in its brief discussion of the George O. Jenkins Company, History Highlights, 1976, mentions that in “1933 a second plant was erected on High Street,” see page 41 in this essay. 112 Bl., July 31, 1886, March 19, 1897, May 20, Aug. 19, 1898, Aug. 7, 1903, March 18, 1904; “Ten Years Ago,” Bl., Aug. 21, 1908; HH, p. 139; “Street Railway System in Bridgewater;” Pictorial History, 1987, p. 37; F. D. King had purchased the old Pratt Tavern property from the Barstow estate in 1886; for more on King see page 35 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910.
granite sills…. The foundations have been very carefully laid, concrete being the material used…. The [low hip] roof will be of Georgia pine and slate, supported by steel trusses.” Since the structure was a transforming station rather than a power house, no smoke stack or noise jarred the sensibilities of neighborhood residences, even if some of them resented the encroachment on the rural nature of their part of Bridgewater. Perhaps more technically-minded Bridgewater men were permitted by the Old Colony to view the station’s interior where high tension machinery, costing more than the building itself, had the capacity to “transform 3000 volts of alternating current into 600 volts of direct current…,” to power the streetcars. In a terse statement on December 9, the Independent reported: “The power was turned into the machinery in the transforming station last Friday, and after Saturday everything was found in good shape. The station on High Street is shut down, and the machinery is to be sold.” The corner of Pleasant Street and Swift Avenue had lost some of its rural charm, but most citizens probably agreed that the Old Colony was “trying to perfect a plan for running and heating its cars to suit its patron.”

Shortly after this plant went into operations, a matter of a different sort threatened to mar the relations between the Old Colony and Bridgewater. At a meeting of the town’s selectmen in early February 1905, the streetcar company presented a petition asking for the right to carry freight and express within Bridgewater, a request based on a state law of 1904, authorizing all street railway companies permission to seek such a privilege. Carrying passengers would still be the main purpose of the trolleys, and the transporting of packages would be done on separate cars. Representing the interests of the Old Colony, J. Montgomery Sears, Jr. “spoke of the benefits to merchants and householders of an express line running through the streets, with a house to house delivery, and a central station in each town, insuring rapid delivery of goods.” No action was taken at this poorly attended meeting, but one participant suggested another meeting be held in a week, so “the matter could be aired in the town.”

Likened to “a miniature town meeting when there is something doing,” fifteen to twenty citizens, mostly merchants, assembled in the selectmen’s office in the town hall on February 13, prepared not only to voice their views about the freight proposal but also to vent some of their past grievances against the

113 BI, March 18, June 10, 24, Oct. 14, Dec. 9, 1904; “Street Railway System in Bridgewater;” at this point I am not able to cite the author of this last source, but acknowledge how helpful it was, especially on the building of the booster station; Townscape Institute, Form 168, pp. 406-407; as of this writing, this former booster station and veterans post remains unoccupied.

114 BI, Feb. 10, 1905.
Old Colony. Some thought it would be a propitious time to demand concessions on freight rates, while others voiced displeasure over the company’s perceived reneging on its promise to macadamize streets on which the rails were laid. Suggestions were made to give the town the right to withdraw from the proposed agreement at any time and a guarantee that freight would only be delivered at night. A particular point of contention among those present had to do with the possible impact on local retailers if the electric cars were allowed to carry freight. John H. Ball, one of Bridgewater’s leading building contractors, already known for taking strong stands on a variety of town issues, predicted that “all the merchants would be forced out of business by out of town stores” if the Old Colony’s petition was granted, an argument supported by Charles Scotton of Scotton and Tyler, a dry goods store on the eastern side of Central Square. Taking a different view, Charles A. Wilbar, Bridgewater’s postmaster, thought the scheme would benefit people in the southern part of the town, toward Raynham and Titicut, since they could place orders with Central Square retailers by telephone and have purchases delivered by the trolleys. Given these concerns, suggestions, and, in some cases, outright opposition, many attendees agreed with Dr. Charles J. Mercer, one of Bridgewater’s dentists, in his assertion that the freight plan was too “experimental” and would be better dealt with at the upcoming town meeting. Lack of action in Bridgewater, however, did not deter the Old Colony from making progress in its drive to carry freight on other parts of its extensive electric streetcar network.115

The freight matter was not brought up in the 1905 town meeting, but surfaced again early in the following year. In late January, the selectmen announced that hearings would be held on February 19 to discuss once more the petition of the Old Colony Street Railway for the right to carry freight on its rails in Bridgewater. A week or so before this meeting in the town hall, the company used the Independent to publicly argue its case and treated the selectmen, Edwin S. Rhoades, William Bassett and Harrison D. Packard, to a streetcar trip “for the purpose of inspecting the proposed trolley express line.” While the heavily attended hearings on the street railway request proved to be “stormy,” it was apparent that those at the meeting were “all in favor of granting [the] franchise,” all the while hoping that the Old Colony would address a number of complaints unrelated to the freight issue. Several weeks later, reflecting a growing

115 BJ, April 6, 1895, Feb. 17, 1905, Feb. 9, 1906; for more on Scotton see page 61 in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; at some point in this account of Bridgewater, I plan to write an essay on the town’s post office through 1925, in which Wilbar’s tenure as the postmaster between 1898 and 1914 will figure highly; in 1895,
consensus that other matters could be dealt with separately, the selectmen, without strings attached, acted favorably on the Old Colony’s petition. In early September, the state railroad commissioners gave their approval of the Old Colony’s petition to do freight business in the towns of Bridgewater, Raynham, and Middleboro. Already well-known for his police and fire department work, Lester W. Wetherell became the company’s local agent in Bridgewater, promising fast, safe, and frequent shipping of goods by the “Trolley Express.”116

Within a year of its inauguration, the trolley express business began to create traffic problems as deliveries were unloaded in Central Square. Engendering a considerable number of negative comments, some of the more vocal complaints came from the operators of horse-drawn wagons, notwithstanding the fact that a number of them made money by carrying goods delivered by trolley to their final destinations, in most cases the residences of town inhabitants. Automobile drivers, including the few local ones and the increasing number of those passing through Bridgewater, also voiced irritation at losing time waiting for a freight-laden trolley to be unloaded. Even those on foot were inconvenienced by being forced to make detours around piles of packages placed on the sidewalk in front of the Tory House and Churchill’s dry good store. “How long is this condition of affairs to last?” queried the Independent on July 5, 1907. The question was soon answered. Within a week the Old Colony announced its plans “to have express cars shifted to Broad Street every noon, where there is not much traffic.…” While deliveries would initially be placed on the sidewalk, the company hoped to purchase a building off Broad Street, which could be easily reached by a spur rail, where packages would be temporarily stored until picked up by a horse-drawn conveyance. This arrangement was soon criticized by drivers of automobiles and horses and by pedestrians. In March of 1908, the streetcar company discontinued unloading and transferring freight altogether in the town’s center and moved its operations to the car barn on Main Street. The move also entailed a change in management. The Bennett Bros. of West Bridgewater took over as agents of the trolley freight business in Bridgewater, replacing Lester Wetherell, who reportedly would probably be transferred to another agency. This express business would continue for a number of years, but beginning in 1911 a new company would replace the Old Colony, bringing changes in passenger and

Dr. Mercer introduced in his “dental parlors” a new device for filling teeth with the aid of electricity.

freight services to the inhabitants of Bridgewater.\textsuperscript{117}

\textbf{The Advent of the Automobile in Bridgewater}

\textit{Late 1890’s through 1910}

As a mode of transportation, the automobile was still in its infancy in 1900, and few would have predicted its dominant role in shaping the economic and social life of the United States, including that of the small town of Bridgewater, during the following century. While this invention was perfected in Germany and France in the 1890’s, J. Frank and Charles E. Duryea of Springfield, Massachusetts, also played a role in its development. They designed the first successful American gasoline-powered motor vehicle in 1893, the year in which the nation plunged into the worse depression up to that time, an economic upheaval in good measure responsible for a delay of several years in the building of the trolley system in Bridgewater. By the end of the century there were thirty American automobile makers producing 2500 automobiles, with 8,000 registered drivers ready to venture forth on roads hardly prepared for these “horseless carriages.” Before the nation’s automakers could take full advantage of the country’s extensive geographic area, a factor favoring the use of the automobile, consumers had to be assured of its reliability, moderate initial cost, and low maintenance expenses, as well as better roads. Taking the lead in accomplishing this, Henry Ford introduced the Model T in 1908, and in the following year declared: “I am going to democratize the automobile. When I’m through everybody will be able to afford one.” How many Bridgewater citizens bought one of the 10,000 Model T’s sold in 1909 is difficult to say, but certainly during the first decade of the new century the town’s inhabitants grew accustomed to seeing more automobiles of various makes traversing its thoroughfares.\textsuperscript{118}

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, when most American cannot imagine life without an automobile, some of the early reactions in Bridgewater to this new mode of transformation

\textsuperscript{117} BJ, July 5, 12, 1907, March 20, May 29, 1908; Pictorial History, 1994, p. 22; Greene, Horses at Work, pp. 171, 189, 251; in her thoughtful study on the role of horses in the rise of industrial America, Greene points out that freight transport using trolleys still required horses “at each end of the streetcar line,” a conclusion that certainly applied to the small town of Bridgewater in the first decade of the twentieth century.

might seem almost incredulous. Not long after the trolley system began to carry the town’s inhabitants hither and yon, vehicles powered by gasoline motors were spotted in Bridgewater. The more observant spectators surely noted that, unlike the streetcars, no rails or centralized source of power were required to move these independent vehicles on their way. That some townsfolk initially did not take the automobile seriously is illustrated by several comments found in the Independent. “We are acquiring fresh knowledge every day about the automobile,” someone quipped in August of 1899, adding that the “conspicuous fact seems to be that when it goes wrong it does not go.” About a month later, “all right” was the unanimous and guarded response of the “many” citizens who were treated to a ride in an automobile by some generous driver, perhaps eager to show off his latest possession. Responding to the many queries about the pronunciation of automobile, the Independent wrote: “The Century gives it au-to-mo-bil, with the accent on the third syllable.” Perhaps having more prescience of how Americans would come to love and cherish their motorized vehicles, another commentator in August in 1899, showing more appreciation of this new mode of travel, wrote: “Two automobiles have passed through town the past week and were the objects of much admiration as they glided gracefully along.”119

Most likely the first automobiles seen in Bridgewater were not locally owned, but rather belonged to someone visiting or passing through town. But it was not long before a few of its citizens became the proud owners of a motor vehicle. There appears to be some disagreement as to who owned the first automobile in the town, a small community of less than 6,000 in 1900. History Highlights, published in 1976 for the Bridgewater Bicentennial Commission, gives the honor to Charles R. Fitch, who in 1902 came from Hartford, Connecticut, to supervise the Stanley Iron Works, as it was officially named in late 1903. In May of 1901, however, the Independent had reported that Frank A. Brackett and Dr. William F. Whitmarsh, who in 1892 had taken over the practice of Dr. Edward Sawyer, located in the house (still extant) next to the Memorial Library on South Street, “have purchased automobiles of the ‘Mobile’ make.” Whether or not these two men better deserve the unique recognition accorded Fitch, certainly neither could have been elated when their vehicles needed repainting after suffering fire damage

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shortly after being delivered. 120

But these “calamities” did not dampen their enthusiasm or that of other “automobilists,” occasionally cited for traveling “on their wheels.” On Memorial Day of 1902, Brackett and his wife joined the Brockton Automobile Club on an outing to North Scituate Beach. Dr. Whitmarsh went on to buy a Stanley automobile, which he sold to F. Dean Swift in June 1904, and “a 20-h. p. Peerless touring car of the 1903 model.” Other Bridgewater physicians, including Drs. Albert F. Hunt and Franklin L. Warren, were among the earlier owners of automobiles, not surprisingly since many doctors in the nation, especially those practicing in rural areas, saw the advantages of adopting them in their practices instead of relying on horses, as had been the case in the nineteenth century. Fitch and his wife, whatever their claim to fame in Bridgewater’s automobile history, made extensive use of their motor vehicles, taking trips to such places as East Gloucester in 1905 and New York State in 1908. Lymann Cornell of the Prattown section of Bridgewater and Fred L. Emerson, superintendent of the McElwain shoe factory for eight years and well-known for his civic activities, also deserve to be cited in this admittedly limited coverage of early car owners. In June of 1904, in what must have been among the longest auto trips yet taken by town’s citizens, Cornell and Emerson journeyed to Missouri to attend the St. Louis Fair. No person in Bridgewater was as closely identified with the early history of the automobile business as William H. Bassett, son of J. Gardner Bassett, founder of the Bridgewater Brick Company in 1901. By 1907 William H. and A. I. Simmons, proprietor of Bridgewater’s leading meat market, were serving as agents for the Ford Motor Company. 121

With registered automobiles and trucks in the United States approaching the half million mark in 1910, it is not surprising that their numbers increased even in small towns like Bridgewater. Yet most Americans, including folks in this town, had little hope of purchasing a motorized vehicle and continued to rely on other modes of transportation, especially the electric streetcars and the steam railroads. In late

121 BI, Aug. 22, 29, 1902, July 31, Sept. 4, 1903, May 27, June 3, 17, Oct. 28, 1904, May 12, Aug. 4, 1905, June 8, 1906, April 5, July 19, 1907, June 26, 1908, Dec. 10, 1909, April 1, 8, June 10, May 27, Nov. 11, 1910; Greene, Horses at Work, p. 264; in her fascinating study, Greene writes: “Because the vehicles could be left unattended, they allowed a doctor to focus exclusively on the patients without being distracted by concerns about his horse. The doctor who arrived in a car was cleaner and did not bring dangerous stable filth into the sickroom;” “Hunt, Albert F. (M. D), 1875 to 1963--Physician,” HH, p. 266; “Warren, Franklin L., 1871 to 1941--Physician,” HH, p. 279; for more on Emerson see page 35 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910.
August of 1907, Henry A. Keith of South Street urged the Independent to rally public support for closing the South Street side of Central Square to automobiles which, he felt, threatened the safety of passengers as they boarded or left streetcars. He was quick to add, however, that the twenty Bridgewater owners of motor vehicles were not the problem, but rather the heavy traffic caused by out-of-town drivers.

Reminiscing about the early 1900’s, Ruth Hooper Bishop and Arthur C. Lord, two of the Bridgewater Historical Collectors to whom the town owes a debt of gratitude for helping preserve its early twentieth century history, both allude to the paucity of cars in Bridgewater. Bishop, nostalgically looking back to the years from 1908 to 1920, writes: “I think people used to be more friendly when I was growing up. We seem to know almost everyone. Was it because we had no TV, radio, nor automobiles to speak of and we walked everywhere.” More matter-of-factly, Lord, writing about the first quarter of the twentieth century, simply notes: “Automobiles were not plentiful in my early days.” Commenting on the debate in 1903 concerning the best route for a new state highway to Cape Cod, the Independent showed limited excitement, predicting that few would “drive to Buzzards Bay by automobile….” A few weeks later, in a leading and long editorial, this same newspaper expressed some doubt if the day would come when there would be “general use of motor cars by all classes….”

Whatever their exact number, automobiles were increasingly seen during this decade in Bridgewater’s Central Square and cruising along on macadamized streets such as Broad, Main, Pleasant, Plymouth, South and Summer. Not surprisingly, accidents involving motor vehicles became more frequent, as did the calls for government regulation. One irate pedestrian, in a public letter appearing in the Independent on June 10, 1904, berated a speeding driver for turning the corner of Main and Pearl Streets at twenty miles an hour, “nearly making an angel of the finer part of my being and hash of my grosser elements.” Furthermore, he went on to say: “It seems strange…that so many men, who are sober and responsible citizens when their autos are safely put away, become seemingly insane the moment their hands touch the levers of their vehicles of destruction.” Perhaps this was the reaction of a citizen unhappy with technological advances in general, but, nonetheless, a feeling shared on some level by other townsfolk as they tried to cope with the dizzy pace of change in the early twentieth century. In a lighter

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vein, an article, appearing in the Independent on May 11, 1906, entitled “The Auto and the Traveler,” alerted its readers that the “season has opened for the autoist to don the goggles and in his flyer do the sights of the country and incidentally ‘do,’ any stray vehicle or human being happening in his path.”

Already accustomed to the screeching sounds of the trolleys as they turned from Main Street to Central Square, Simmons’s corner, the site of Bridgewater’s leading meat market since 1889, now had to endure the antics of speeding motorists, often simply passing through the town. In late July of 1903, a little girl almost lost her life at the hands of a driver who failed to slow down when turning the corner at this junction. Four years later, a big touring car, after “tearing down South Street,”… “nearly swept a horse off its feet” at this hazardous intersection. No apology was made, with the errant driver quickly moving on at an even higher speed. This corner remained for many years the most perilous location in Bridgewater for traffic mishaps. Perhaps, as one commentator speculated in 1907, only fate prevented a serious accident at this junction, known as “dangerous alike to the foot traveler, drivers of teams and automobilists.” Motor vehicles accidents, usually without dire consequences, also occurred elsewhere in the town. The impact of a crash along the Common in 1909 remained very visible for a day before workers replaced one stone post and twenty feet of iron railing. Other mishaps, invariably caused by speeding motorists, took place on South Street, the part of Pleasant Street in Scotland, and at corners such as Main and Union, Main and South, and Library Place and South. Sometimes automobile collisions involved older modes of transportation, in particular a variety of horse-drawn vehicles, illustrating the complex traffic mixture prevalent in the early 1900’s.

The increased number of automobiles, not surprisingly, was accompanied by the beginnings of local and state regulation. Bridgewater might have joined other communities in passing local ordinances, in particular to control speeding, had not the state legislature come into the act by enacting regulatory legislation in the summers of 1903 and 1907. Laws passed by the General Court provided for the registering and numbering of every motor vehicle and the licensing of every operator. Living in a town having several hundred horses, Bridgewater’s automobile owners, although few in number, must have

123 BI, June 10, 1904, May 11, 1906; at some point, I plan to write about Bridgewater’s Street Department, paying some attention to the macadamizing of its roadways.
taken notice of the state legislation protecting these animals from being frightened by this new form of transportation on the highways and byways of the Commonwealth, even if it meant bringing a motor vehicle to a full stop. Depending on the location and other circumstances, speed limits for motor vehicles were set at eight to fifteen miles an hour.\footnote{\textit{IB}, July 31, 1903, Aug. 9, 30, 1907.}

It was one thing for the General Court to enact legislation on speeding, but another for local communities to enforce it. In late spring of 1905, Bridgewater’s selectmen were determined to prevent this misdemeanor. Police officers staked out an eighth of a mile, east of High and Center Streets, on Main Street, a main thoroughfare connecting the town to West Bridgewater and Brockton, hoping to record the number plates of machines traveling thirty to forty miles an hour. Somehow word got out about the speed trap, and drivers slowed down to a crawl in the “designated” area. Only one vehicle in five hours was found to be speeding. “It must be remembered,” commented the \textit{Independent}, “that the operators…are becoming wise in scenting trouble, and are also clannish in giving the alarm.” Putting speed-limit signs in this same area leading to Simmons’s corner in Central Square did not help much either. In 1907, one local automobile enthusiast, who thought speeding should be curbed, remarked that the signs were hardly conspicuous enough for most drivers to see. He wondered if “they had been put up for the sole purpose of obeying some obnoxious law and those who placed them there meant that the readers should infer that, and they did not care how fast motor vehicles speeded.” The Safe Roads Automobile Association, not without a modicum of vigilantism, proposed to offer rewards for information on reckless drivers, which could lead to the revocation of their licenses. Nothing came of this suggestion, but it was apparent by the early 1900’s that states and local communities, including Bridgewater, groping for an answer to how far government should regulate a new form of private transportation for the public good.”\footnote{\textit{IB}, July 31, 1903, Aug. 9, 30, 1907.}

Despite the novelty of motor vehicles, certain hallmarks of the automobile economy, so apparent as the twentieth century progressed, were becoming evident in Bridgewater. Businesses, some old, some new, began to see the opportunities afforded by this new mode of transportation. George J. Alcott, arriving from Chelsea, Massachusetts, to take over the Bridgewater Inn in the fall of 1898, was among the first in the town to surmise how the automobile might impact some commercial enterprises. Perhaps
influenced by the author Winston Churchill’s automobile stop at the hostelry on July 19, 1903, on his way to New Hampshire, Alcott, three years later, built a cement garage to accommodate those patrons traveling by this latest from of transportation. For the convenience of his clientele, Alcott installed a gasoline tank in his garage in 1904 and began to advertise that automobile parties could be accommodated.127

Alcott’s inn was not the only enterprise in Bridgewater to realize the economic potential of the budding use of motor vehicles. William H. Bassett and Albert I. Simmons, two early owners of machines, joined together in 1907 to become the town’s Ford agency. At the end of the decade, Bassett, whose father J. Gardner had established the Bridgewater Brick Company in 1901, opened a car garage on Main Street, a few steps away from its junction with Broad Street. For those car owners wanting quality Michelin tires, Bassett’s was the place to go. (This business would be well-known in Bridgewater for about five decades, and the site it occupied is now the location of the new Cumberland Farm Store.) When Dr. Warren’s Buick was badly damage in 1910, it was only natural to have it towed to this garage for major repair work. Bridgewater Insurance businesses also sensed opportunities to expand their offerings. Thomas W. Crocker in the Independent Building and Lewis G. Lowe & Son in the Bridgewater Saving Bank building, both located on the western side of Central Square, began to advertise automobile insurance. Crocker’s ads included the boast that it carried “the very best chemical Fire Extinguishers for buildings and automobiles,” perhaps not the most ensuring words for a person contemplating the purchase of a car. By the end of the decade, Jenkins leather board mill in Prattown began using a motorized truck to cart its products to surrounding communities instead of entirely relying on the freight railroad. Although only a small portion of Bridgewater’s population by the early 1900’s, farmers, who might complain about the dust kicked up by speeding cars, began to see the advantages of using motorized vehicles to get their summer produce to hotels and grocery and fruit stores more quickly. In short, then, Bridgewater, like other communities, began to feel the economic impact of this new mode of transportation between 1901 and 1910. The economic and cultural effects of motor vehicles would

126 BI, June 9, 1905, July 26, 1907; Greene, Horses at Work, p. 263.
127 BI, Sept. 30, Oct. 7, 1898, Dec. 22, 1899; July 24, 1903, June 15, 1906, July 5, Aug. 9, 1907; Bridgewater Book; HH, p. 140; after running the inn for five years, J. F. Greaney was succeeded by Alcott on October 1, 1898; in what was considered to be an important real estate transaction, Alcott bought the Bridgewater Inn from William Lyons of Boston in December of 1899; for more on Alcott see pages 31-34 and 90-92 in my essay on stores and services in
multiply greatly as the twentieth century unfolded, a conclusion that will be supported in a second essay on transportation in Bridgewater covering the years 1911 to 1925.\textsuperscript{128}

**Bicycles in Bridgewater**

*(Through 1910)*

Before ending this discussion on the modes of transportation in Bridgewater through 1910, a few comments about bicycles might be order. Not a great deal has been said about this technological innovation in most textbooks in American history and little or nothing in town histories that I have consulted. When the subject of bicycling is included, it is usually cited as a form of recreation which became popular in the late nineteenth century, a period sometimes labeled the late Victorian era or, in the United States, the “Gay Nineties.” Published in 1892, the song “Daisy Bell,” with its final words “But you’ll look sweet on the seat of a bicycle built for two,” best expressed the view many contemporaries had of this new mode of getting around, which in the words of Ann Norton Greene’s recent study *Horses at Work* “allowed an efficient translation of human muscle effort into motion….” She goes on to say that the popularity of bicycles by 1890’s “alarmed veterinarians and livery stable owners” who were convinced that they would have an adverse impact on their businesses. Whether or not this point was expressed by those enterprises in Bridgewater dealing with horses I can’t say. What is apparent, however, is that as the century drew to a close we see more bicycles on the town’s streets and sidewalks (in the latter case, to the dismay of many), as well as an increase in bicycle-related commercial endeavors.\textsuperscript{129}

Current historical scholarship suggests that inventors from several countries, especially starting in the early nineteenth century, contributed ideas to the development of the bicycle. In 1878, a factory in

\textsuperscript{128} *BI*, July 29, 1904, April 5, July 5, Aug. 9, 23, 1907, April 1, May 27, Dec. 2, 1910, Aug. 18, 1911; *Census of Massachusetts*, 1905, Vol. I, p. 336; *Bridgewater Book: Tales Around the Common*, p. 10; D. Moore, *Images of America: Bridgewater*, p. 39; Diner, *A Very Different Age*, p. 56; for more information on Bassett and Crocker insurance services see pages 36-37 and 98-100, respectively, in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; for more about Jenkins factory see pages 47-48 in my essay on manufacturing in Bridgewater through 1910.

Hartford, Connecticut, became the first American one to manufacture a type of bicycle, but its price of $125.00 was well beyond the means of most people, including the inhabitants of the small town of Bridgewater, Massachusetts. During the following decade, several innovations, including pneumatic tires, improvements in metallurgy, and the safety bicycle, prepared the way for the mass production of bicycles, which could be used as transportation for Bridgewater workingmen and as recreation for both sexes, especially taking long rides in the surrounding countryside. For more competitive-leaning riders there were the bicycle races sponsored by the Plymouth County Agricultural Society in its annual fairs held on grounds off Broad Street in Bridgewater. In 1899, town bicyclists read with interest that they could secure tickets to a five-day (August 14th to the 19th) bicycle tournament to be held at the Charles River Park in Boston. One writer avers that by the early 1890’s, about one in seven Americans had a bicycle, with the tandem bike, which inspired the song mentioned above, especially popular.130

Lack of available statistics on bicycle ownership in Bridgewater from the 1890’s to 1910 prevents me from asserting that this national statistic applies to this small community. What is clear, however, is that a number of commercial enterprises in Bridgewater started catering to the needs of the town’s bicyclists during these years. The town’s two rival pharmacists, Wilcox Bros. and Cole’s, both located in Central Square, became agents for companies manufacturing and selling bicycles. In 1893, Henry A. and Nathaniel Wilcox, five years after taking over Nahum Washburn’s drugstore, located next to the Congregational church on the western side of the Square, became agents for selling Columbia Bicycles manufactured at the Hartford factory. Perhaps aware of the national economic downturn just beginning, this drug store let it be known it carried a supply of “second hand wheels in good condition.” Situated on the northeastern part of the Square, Cole’s, established several years before its competitor, reported in the spring of 1895 the “sale of two Majestic bicycles…one for a lady and one for a gentleman.” Two years later, the same retailer advertised “Ladies’ and Gents’ Bicycles and Sundries,” as “some of the things” it had to sell. I don’t know how many Bridgewater women rode bikes in this era, but social historians suggests that “freer styles of cycling costumes began to have an influence on

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everyday fashions.”

Those interested in purchasing a bicycle could also visit the Central Square jewelry store of Harry A. Clark, one of the occupants of the Keith Block, a few minutes’ walk northeast of Wilcox’s.

Several years after succeeding Edward A. Hewett as the proprietor of this jewelry business in 1887, Clark became an agent for the company that manufactured Waverley Victor bicycles. Weighing “22 to 25 lbs,” these vehicles sold for “$75 to $100,” certainly a price range beyond the budget of most folks in Bridgewater. I don’t know how successful this part of Clark’s enterprise was, but given his mechanical leanings he must have been fascinated by this relatively new piece of technology. Also, S. J. Donahue, a shoe dealer and one of Clark’s close retail neighbors, was an agent for a bicycle company known as Singer, Crescent, and Barnes. Not surprisingly, bicycles were also included in the “variety of articles too numerous to mention” sold by John H. Fairbank’s hardware store across the Commons from Wilcox’s.

Most likely, this retail enterprise, among the oldest in Bridgewater by the 1890’s, also repaired bikes or, at least, offered its patrons tips on how to fix mechanical problems themselves. Dealing exclusively in bikes was Whitcomb’s shop, located on Main Street across from Bassett’s automobile garage and next to the home and print shop of Arthur H. Willis. Writing about his memories of the Bridgewater of 1910, Harold Goodnought, “successfully associated for many years with several major league baseball teams in a variety of posts,” tells about buying his first bike at Whitcomb’s for twenty dollars; one suspects it was secondhand or, perhaps, the price of a new bike had come down since 1890’s. Another bike shop was run by Halsey Ashley on Hale Street in an old barn, which was part of the property owned by John P. Townsend. (His daughter Flora married Walter S. Little in 1902, and went on to become one of Bridgewater’s most prominent citizens of the twentieth century.) Not as wedded to the principle of shopping locally, some Bridgewater shoppers in the market for a bicycle might have been lured by the ads of H. A. Churchill & Co. This Brockton outfit boasted “the largest line of bicycles” in the region, suggested payments could be made in installments, and promised to guarantee all repairing. Checking

131 BI, June 10, 1893, June 15, 1895, May 21, 1897; Pictorial History, 1987, p. 16; Norton, A History of the United States, Volume B, since 1865, p. 374; Mozer, “Chronology of the Growth of Bicycling….,” p. 4; for more on Cole’s and Wilcox’s see pages 13-15, 62-64 and 25-26, 64-66, respectively, in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; I plan to write an essay on agriculture in Bridgewater in the early 1900’s, which will included a section on the history of the Plymouth County Agriculture Society; this organization held its last annual fair in Bridgewater in September of 1898.
out these claims might have been worth a fifteen cent trolley ride to the Shoe City from Bridgewater.

Compared to horses, steam railroads, electric streetcars, and motor vehicles, bicycles hardly constituted a major way of getting around for many inhabitants of Bridgewater between the 1890’s and 1910. Like the more important modes of transportation, however, bicycles were privately owned but often used public space, thus subjecting them to a certain amount of scrutiny from town citizens and government. Whether the “considerable talk” in the spring of 1895 about taxing bicycles in Bridgewater was engendered by those simply seeking another source of town revenue or by bicycle enthusiasts hoping the money would be specifically “expended on the roads” I don’t know. It is possible that some town bicyclists were familiar with such publications as “American Wheelman” and “Outing” that advocated this approach. At this point, I have not come across evidence of this tax being levied in Bridgewater, even though it was used to advantage in some other towns. It also seems that bicycles did not have to be registered, unlike automobiles which were required to do so by state law beginning in the early 1900’s.

By far, the vexatious practice of bicyclists riding on sidewalks evoked the most public criticism of this mode of transportation, especially when it led to a serious accident. On May 6, 1899, to cite one example, Mrs. M. H. McFadden was struck by a bicycle as she was leaving her residence on Bedford Street, on her way to fetch a doctor for her ailing brother-in-law Edward Brown. In the words of the Independent reporter, she was “knocked down and severely cut on the nose and face, bruised generally.” To emphasize the seriousness of the accident, the writer went on to say that the “bicycle went over her head and it is remarkable that she was not mortally injured.” Not all serious bicycle accidents occurred on sidewalks. Nonetheless, it was this type of mishap which drew the attention of the public and town selectmen in part because both local ordinances and state legislation forbade this practice. Despite periodic attempts to crack down on those violating the law by levying fines and even making arrests, Bridgewater’s pedestrians continued to be well-advised to keep a lookout for a two-wheeled vehicle powered by human muscle. Hopefully, some town bicyclists in April of 1910 took note of warnings of

132 BH, April 3, July 30, Aug. 31, 1895, April 18, 1896, Jan. 20, 1899, April 20, 1900, April 4, 1924; Lord, “First Quarter of the Century in Bridgewater,” Tales Around the Common, pp. 45, 46; Bridgewater Book, p. viii; Hal Goodnough, “Bridgewater about 1910,” HH, p. 232; HH, pp. 270-271; Tales Around the Common, p. 10; for more about Clark and Fairbanks see pages 19-20, 73 and pages 6-8, 54-55, respectively, in my essay on stores and services in Bridgewater through 1910; before it was moved to Pearl Street in 1924, the Willis House was located on the site now occupied by the Bridgewater Savings Bank; Whitcomb’s bike shop, before it was torn down, was located on the present parking lot of Bridgewater Savings Bank on Main Street.
possible “court proceedings” against violators of the law and these reasonable words of their local newspaper: “The roads of the town are in good condition and there is no more reason for bicycles taking to the sidewalks than there would be for carriages or automobiles.”

133 BI, May 25, 1895, July 31, 1903; Greene, Horses at Work, p. 257.

134 BI, April 28, May 12, 1899, June 1, 1900, June 28, July 19, 1901, Sept. 18, 1903, July 21,1905, June 8, 1906, July 19, 1907, Oct. 30, Nov. 20, 1908, April 1, 1910.
A Note to My Readers

At some point in my research and writing I will prepare an essay dealing with transportation in Bridgewater between 1911 and 1925. It will continue the discussion of the five modes of transportation presented in this first study, but devote considerably more space to motorized vehicles, especially the automobile.
About the Author

Benjamin A. Spence, a native of Fall River, Massachusetts, a city about twenty miles south of Bridgewater, began his education in the public schools of that community. He attended Bridgewater State College between 1955 and 1959, earning his undergraduate degree in secondary education and history. After teaching social studies at the junior-senior high school level in Somerset, Massachusetts, for two years, he went on to receive his MS, 1962, and PhD, 1971, in history from the University of Wisconsin. Almost all of Dr. Spence’s teaching career was spent at Bridgewater State. Following his retirement in 1995, he began to do historical research on the Town of Bridgewater, concentrating mainly on the first quarter of the twentieth century, a period of American history in which he specialized.