



In the 19th Century, stagecoaches ruled in Stow – supporting a strong inn and livery business. This Concord Coach, today owned by the Wayside Inn, packed in nine passengers. It makes an annual appearance at the Collings Foundation.

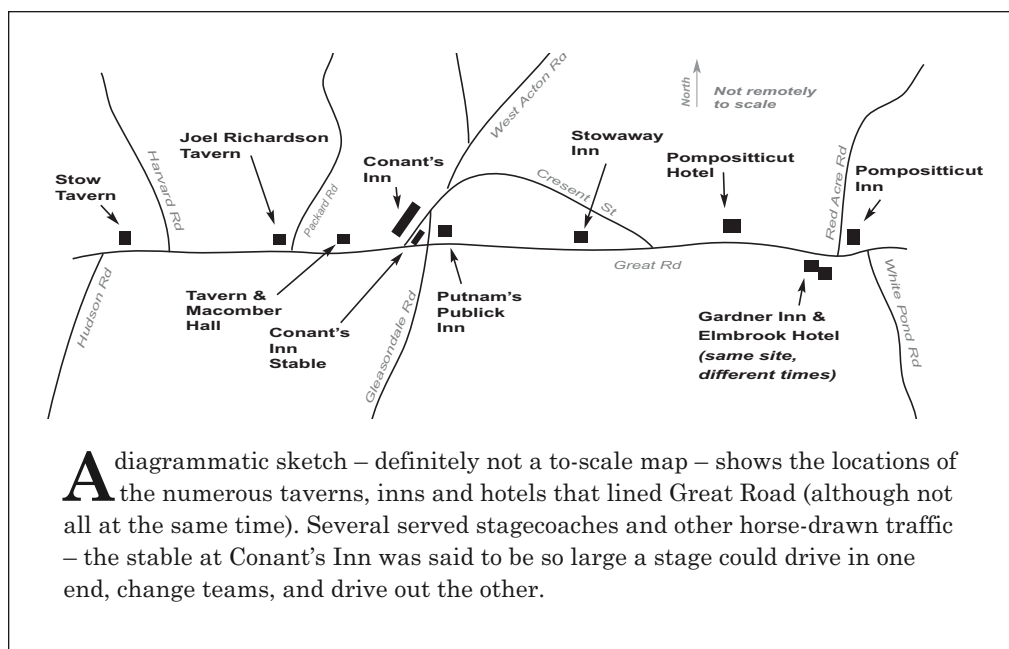
6. Mass Transit Things

During the first half of the 19th Century, Stow was a major stopping point for stagecoaches traveling between Boston and points west. Inns and hotels along Great Road served both travelers and horses.

It took approximately four hours for stagecoaches to make the trip between Boston and Stow, two days for freight

wagons. From Stow, roads ran west toward Lancaster and Fitchburg (and on to Albany, in New York).

Hostelries like Conant's Tavern and the Pompositticut Hotel had large stables where stagecoaches and freight wagons changed teams. Because of the town's key position, as many as 100 horses were stabled here some nights.



Horsepower literally meant horses in the 19th Century, as this two-horsepower mail coach demonstrates. As with stage and freight wagon transport, the Great Road through Stow was a major mail route, serving towns from Boston all the way to Albany.



Early roads, naturally, followed the path of least resistance. At first, what we know as Great Road extended east to the Assabet River – and stopped. Until a bridge was built across the river in 1816, the main route east was White Pond Road, then called New Lancaster Road.

Because Minister’s Pond blocked the original route of Great Road, the highway veered along what is now Crescent Street before returning to the present Great Road right-of-way. Great Road was straightened in 1810 when a causeway was built across the pond. Similar adjustments were later made where it swung along Wheeler and Whitney Roads and over Old Bolton Road.

When progress came in the form of railroads toward the mid-1800s, however, the entrepreneurs of Stow rejected it outright – and it’s safe to say their decisions helped make Stow, Gleasondale and Lake Boon the places they became.

Fearing the demise of a bustling stage-

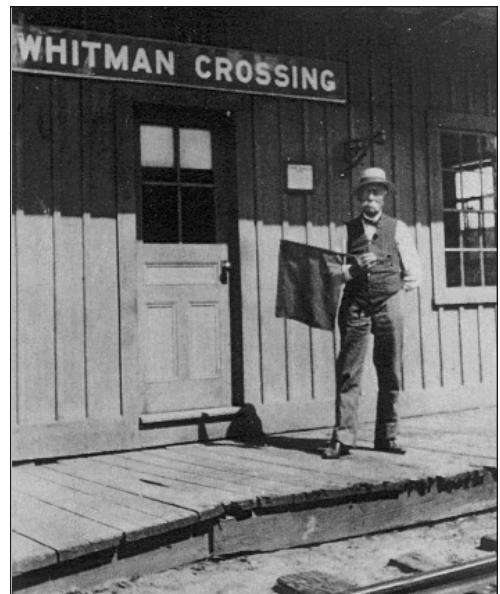
coach traffic (which happened anyway), stage and tavern owners resisted construction of an east-west railway along the most efficient route – through Stow center.

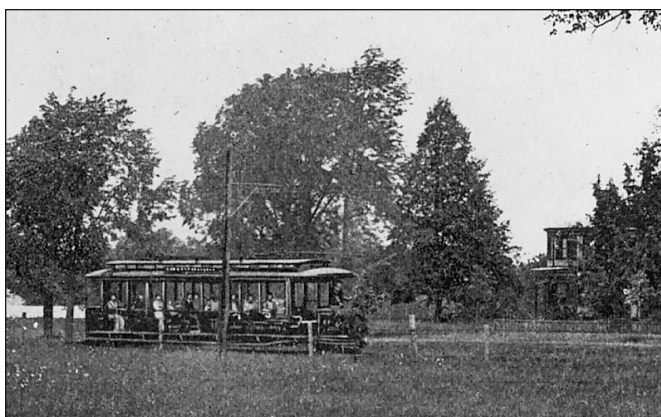
In its place, the Boston & Maine Railroad line from Boston to Fitchburg was run through Concord, South Acton and West Acton, with a branch from South Acton extending through Maynard, Rock Bottom, Hudson and Marlborough.

As it turned out, a horse-drawn service called the “Stow Express” carried passengers and mail from Stow center to the station at South Acton.

With these developments, at one time Stow had three train stations – all concentrated around Rock Bottom. Two separate stations there served different branches of

When the railroad came to Stow in the 1840s, it went south of Stow center to Gleasondale and Hudson. Whitman Crossing, near Lake Boon, was a convenient shipping point for farmers sending goods into Boston. “Mr. Potter” was the station master there.





The trolley – here passing an unmowed Lower Common – connected Concord, Maynard, Stow, Gleasondale and Hudson during the first two decades of the 20th Century.

One memoir suggests that riding the trolley from one end of the line to the other constituted a hot Saturday-night date.

the B&M system, and one branch had a station (called Whitman Crossing) on Sudbury Road at the Assabet River bridge.

It was there because landowner Edward Whitman wouldn't give them a right-of-way unless they put a stop there – and called it Whitman Crossing.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, a railroad of sorts did come to Stow center – the Concord, Maynard & Hudson Street Railway, which ran trolleys along Great Road, turned the corner at the Upper Common onto Gleasondale Road and proceeded south to Gleasondale and Hudson.

Powered by overhead electrical cables, at first the trolleys' sides were totally open to the air, with canvas curtains for protection

from rain. Benches extended the full width of the cars, so that the conductor had to walk along a ledge on the outside of the car to move between rows.

Later, the trolley cars were enclosed – presumably with seats that let the conductor stay inside.

To avoid steep hills along the way, the tracks sometimes cut into the surrounding woods. The “Treaty Elm” of Treaty Elm Lane was the great tree under which landowner Andrew Smith and railroad officials sat while they negotiated a right-of-way sale over his property.

Trolleys operated in Stow from 1901 to 1923, finally yielding to rising costs and the popularity of the automobile.



As automobiles like this Model T Ford arrived in Stow, so did gas stations – and the trolley declined. From 1916 to 1938, the Bungalow Shop sold groceries and other goods, including gasoline. The building still stands, tucked away on Crescent Street behind Randall Library.



As the 1900s progressed, trucks became the vehicles of choice for moving freight, at least regionally. Fruit Acres was one of Stow's leading apple growers in the first half of the century.

To accommodate motor vehicles, new businesses appeared. A small store sold gas from a pair of pumps at the corner of Great Road and Gleasondale Road – now the parking lot for the One Main Street florist. They disappeared after the Central Garage opened across the road in 1927.

A lunch spot called the Village Green sold gas from two pumps across the road from the Lower Common before becoming the Erkkinen Service Center in the 1930s.

After the trolleys disappeared, the area was served by the Lovell Bus Line, which ran buses between Hudson and Maynard every half-hour – until it, too, yielded to the automobile in the 1950s.

Today, the motor vehicle reigns. Stow residents own nearly 7,700 cars, trucks and motorcycles, or, on average, just about three for every household in the town.

For many years, Stow got by with a blinking yellow light at the intersection of Great Road and Gleasondale Road, then one that blinked red toward Gleasondale and yellow toward Great Road. Finally, a full traffic signal was deemed necessary around the mid-1980s.

In the early 2000s, the town's traffic light count zoomed to two when a second signal was installed at the Bose complex on Great Road to accommodate the added traffic of its 500 employees.

Today, the mobility of the automobile makes the suburbanized Stow possible.

