

Highways At The Site Of Quabbin Reservoir

Editor Banner:—

In response to your request for something about the "New Highway" the map printed herewith has been prepared. Aside from the reservoir itself the principal things shown on it are the highways that have already been built or are being built by the Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission on the south and west of the site of the reservoir in the Swift River Valley, authorized by Chapter 321, Acts of 1927; now officially named the Quabbin Reservoir. One sees also the present location of Route 21 (Athol to Springfield) and parts of Route 32 and Route 9 (formerly numbered 109); while extending across the northerly part of the map is a dotted line showing the old stage route from Greenfield to Worcester which was one of the main arteries of travel about one hundred years ago before railroads were built in this vicinity. One of the stage drivers, Ginery Twitchell, is said to have later become president of the Boston & Albany railroad. In 1835 certain relocations and refinements in this stage road were ordered by the County Commissioners, which included working of the roadbed to a width of eighteen feet at all points, with twelve inches crown at the center, culverts and bridges to be twenty feet wide and the grade through New Salem and Wendell not to exceed four degrees of rise or descent (a little less than seven per cent). At the point where the new highway crosses Moosehorn Brook and this old stage road the latter has now been filled in to a depth of about thirty-five feet.

Attention is also called, on the map, to that section of territory to the south of New Salem lying between the middle and west branches of the Swift River and now parts of Prescott, Enfield, Greenwich and Dana that are eventually to be annexed to New Salem.

By section 8 of said chapter 321, the Commission was directed to construct when "Public necessity or convenience require, other suitable ways in lieu of those discontinued." To properly connect the ends of the highways to be flooded probably means the construction of a new highway of some type, entirely around the reservoir. As this reservoir, when filled with water to an elevation of 530 feet above Boston base, will extend about 17 miles in a northerly direction from the main dam, or about one-third of the distance across the state, it would seem that there should be a good highway from east to west both above and below the reservoir and as near as possible to it.

This has already been accomplished below the dam by a relocation of Route 9 (the "Berkshire Trail"); the Commission having completed in 1932 about 5.2 miles of new highway between Quabbin Park cemetery and the present Route 21; and the Department of Public Works, that same year, having extended this highway about one mile farther to the west to a junction with the Belchertown-Amherst highway; bypassing Belchertown; shortening Route 9 by about three miles.

To the north of the reservoir the old stage road before mentioned, still a county road, suggests a good general route for an east and west highway if from a point just east of Hagerville it should swing farther north to pass between North and South Spectacle ponds and skirt the northerly end of the reservoir to join the new highway under construction at a point just east of the Middle Branch of Swift River; thence southwesterly by the new highway back to the old stage route again at Moosehorn Brook (or, possibly by a shorter cut, meeting it farther west); then following the old stage route through the towns of Wendell, Shutesbury and Leverett to Montague where it would connect with good roads to Turners Falls, Millers Falls, Greenfield, Deerfield, Sunderland and Amherst. It would also give to Orange and Athol a new route to all these towns as well as giving all of them

a good route to Petersham, Barre and points to the east, south and southeast.

Today the word turnpike signifies a great motor road or super-highway of several lanes, but many of the early roads through this section were known as turnpikes, being built by private corporations and supported by tolls paid by those using them. Just after the founding of New Salem Academy in 1795, many of these turnpikes were constructed and continued in operation for about fifty years when they became public property, having been superseded by the railroads then being built. The Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike, chartered in 1799, passed through Orange and Athol. The Sixth, chartered the same year, went from Amherst through Pelham, Greenwich and Hardwick to Worcester. There was also the Belchertown and Greenwich and on February 29, 1804 was chartered the Petersham and Monson Company to build a road from the Fifth Turnpike in Athol, through Petersham, Dana, Greenwich, Ware, Palmer and Monson, to connect in the latter place with the road to Stafford, Connecticut. This Monson Turnpike left Athol by Pleasant street and can be traced on the map through the easterly part of Petersham to North Dana, then following closely the line of the B. & A. R. R. to Greenwich, continuing on between Mount Lizzie and Little Quabbin and along the west side of Quabbin Park cemetery.

Now after over a century has elapsed since the construction of the Monson Turnpike and other early roads through the Swift River Valley other big roads are being built but this time over the hills surrounding this beautiful valley. Much surveying and planning have been necessary to find a suitable route through this hilly country that would have no grades steeper than six per cent, no curves sharper than five degrees and 500-foot visibility, which was necessary if modern state highway requirements were to be met, but so far this has been done. The width of the location is 80 feet, the travel surface is of macadam, 24 feet wide, with shoulders of gravel

three feet wide and the slopes in the cuts will be loamed and seeded. When completed the highway will be turned over to the state department of public works as a state highway, thus relieving the towns which it crosses of maintaining it.

The section of 5.2 miles completed in 1932 was built by the Lane Construction Corporation of Meriden, Connecticut, at a cost of \$225,707.19. Of the 20.8 miles now under construction, the 9.1 miles from Route 9 in Belchertown through Pelham to the Franklin-Hampshire County line is being built by Carlo Bianchi & Co., Inc., of Framingham, Mass., the lowest of 14 bidders, his bid being \$222,335.50. The next section of 7.6 miles in Shutesbury and New Salem was awarded to the V. Barletta Co. of Roslindale, Mass., for \$300,397.50; while the section of 4.1 miles from New Salem Center to a point in the town of Orange, about one-fourth mile north of the Orange-New Salem line is being built by the John Iafolla Construction Co., of Dedham, Mass., the contract price being \$179,480.50.

The highway passes twice through the town of Shutesbury and twice through the town of New Salem. After crossing from Shutesbury into New Salem at the West Branch of Swift River and passing the village of Cooleyville, it goes in the rear of the house of the late Edward Freeman, thus entering Shutesbury again for a very short distance; as the town corner is a mark on the underpinning of this house. In all the 20.8 miles from Belchertown to Orange there is not a bridge. Box culverts have been used, the largest being twin culverts 8 by 8 feet in cross section at the West Branch of Swift River, near Cooleyville, and twin culverts 7 by 9 feet at the Middle Branch near North New Salem. When later extended to Athol from the present northerly terminus it will be a replacement of the present Route 21 and will probably bear that number.

It seems desirable that a name should also be given to it that will be at once short, euphonious, suggestive of its high elevation and scenic beauty, perhaps have historical signifi-

cance and apply equally well to all parts of it.

In planning the new thoroughfare the commission and its engineers gave much attention to its scenic possibilities where they could do so without sacrificing its utility: resulting in a route of unusual scenic beauty, for the new road is a **high way** as well as a highway, running as it does for miles at an elevation of from 900 to 1100 feet along the **skyline**, as it were **overlooking** the valley in which will glisten, a few years hence, the waters of Quabbin Reservoir; and affording a **grand view** and a broad **outlook** extending as far as Mt. Monadnock in New Hampshire, Mt. Wachusett on the east and the Holyoke range to the south and west and over all the cerulean dome of the sky, with fleecy clouds, perhaps — in truth a **Welkin Highway** in all its length and every sense of the word. The word **Welkin**, defined by one dictionary as the visible regions of the air, the vault of heaven or the sky — has also an especial historical significance to New Salem people, as about 35 years ago it was seriously proposed to change the name of New Salem to Welkin.

Let us reserve the name Hessian Trail for an east-west highway like the one suggested in this article — the Hessians were going from Saratoga to Boston — not in a north-south direction. They are said to have stopped for apples at the Thomas Andrews farm near North New Salem, crossed by this highway, where a marker might well be erected stating that fact. Also the notch on the north slope of Packard Mountain between Cooleyville and New Salem Center, through which the new highway passes, could very appropriately be named Packard Pass and so designated by an inscription on a tablet or boulder. Perhaps, too, something like the Shay's Rebellion tablet at Petersham might be erected at some point in Pelham along the new highway.

Old Chief Quabbin would seem to be sufficiently honored by naming Quabbin Mountain, Quabbin Lake, Quabbin Aqueduct, Quabbin Park cemetery and Quabbin Reservoir af-

ter him. As the word quabbin is said to mean "many waters" it would seem more appropriate for a reservoir than for a highway.

Swift River Highway is a very appropriate name for the present Route 21 which is close to the Swift River for considerable distances, but is a misnomer when applied to a highway over the hills away from that river, and not closely following any stream, except Jabish Brook, for any considerable distance.

During the past year many names have come to me by mail, through the press, by telephone and verbally; and I include herewith a list of them, numbering about 40 as follows:

- Welkin Highway
- Welkin Way
- Welkin Trail
- Highland View Trail
- Grand View Trail
- Overlook Trail
- Outlook Trail
- Skyline Trail
- Swift River Highway
- Swift River Trail
- Swift River Road
- Swift River Turnpike
- Quabbin Highway
- Quabbin-Hessian Highway
- New Salem Highway
- Franklin-Hampshire Trail
- Coolidge Highway
- Calvin Coolidge Highway
- The A-C-A or
Adams, Coolidge, Adams Highway
- Packard Pass
- Packard Highway
- Mount Packard Highway
- Holland Packard Highway
- The Trail of the Hessians
- Hessian Highway
- Hessian Trail
- Shay's Trail

Shay's Rebellion Trail
 The Daniel Shea Trail
 Shayesdell Road
 Gov. Dudley Highway
 King's Highway
 Moosehorn Trail
 Rohunta Highway
 Reservoir Road
 Metropolitan Highway
 The Great Divide
 The Southern Trail
 Memory's Trail
 Horizon Trail
 Horizon Highway
 Tiptop Trail

Perhaps there are other names that people would like to propose, if so I would be glad to have them send them to me.

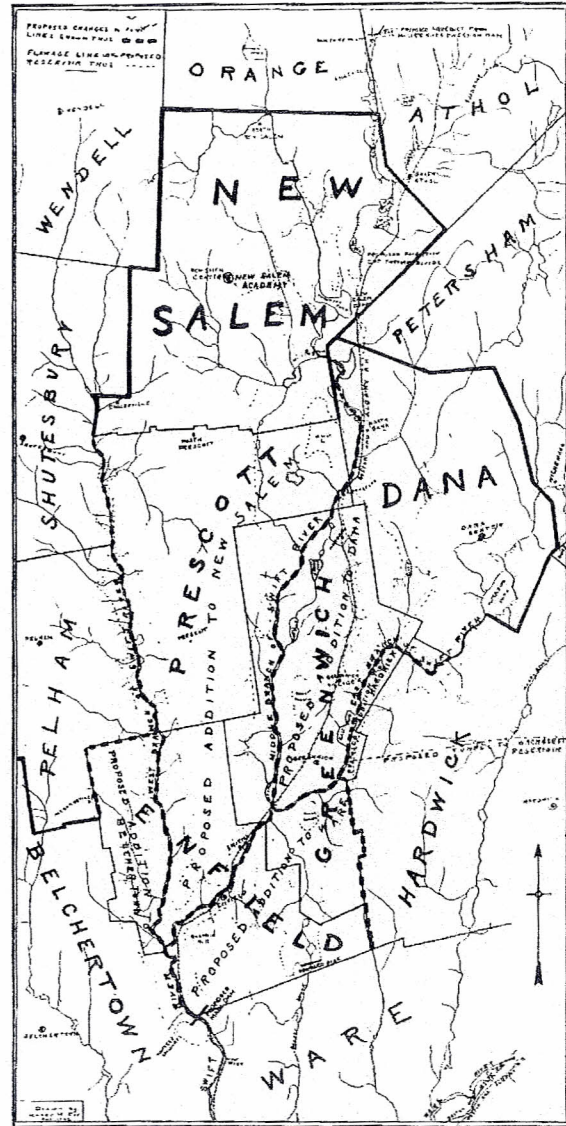
While at several places in Belchertown, Pelham, Shutesbury and New Salem the scenery is especially fine, there are two places in the latter town where a wonderful view, now mostly hidden by trees could be opened up: one at a point just north of New Salem Center and the other at the old Andrews farm where 1000 Hessian soldiers stopped in 1777. Natural features at each place favor the development of an attractive park also if that were desirable.

Since 1795 the doors of New Salem Academy have been open continuously. Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles, co-founders of Spelman Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia, received their early education here, as did also Henry F. Cutler, for many years principal of Mount Hermon School, and many others; today some of its graduates are taking high honors at colleges and now that New Salem is to be on a great state highway its future should be very bright.

HARRY W. FAY, '98

New Salem, Mass.
 August, 1934.

(Reprinted with slight changes and additions from 1934 New Salem Academy Reunion Banner)



Map Of A Part Of The SWIFT RIVER VALLEY

Showing
 Proposed Changes In Town Lines
 At The Site Of
 QUABBIN RESERVOIR