

Old Dorchester-South Boston Turnpike

Events Leading Up to Its Construction

By Lawrence F. Berry

PART ONE:

In order to better understand what is to follow and add interest to the article, a few points of information should be stated in review regarding South Boston as it was before the eighteen hundreds. This territory was originally all part of the old town of Dorchester; earlier known by the Indians as "Mattapanock" or Mattapan Neck. Our pioneer white settlers knew the three divisions of the Red Man's Mattapan as; "The Great Pasture," "Allen's Plain," and "Rocky Hill." "The Great Pasture" was later called Dorchester Neck, divided into Great Neck and Little Neck, and connected with "Allen's Plain" by a causeway following approximately Boston and Dorchester Streets. "Allen's Plain" was that territory in and around Edward Everett Square, Uphams Corner, and Glover's Corner; while "Rocky Hill" was the present day Savin Hill.

The Causeway was the main pathway from Dorchester to the Point, now City Point. It was originally trodden by the "Mattapan" cattle daily and gates were provided to confine them on the peninsula. This "Causeway over to Dorchester Neck" in the course of time became a public street.

"Mattapanock" or "Dorchester Neck" in 1800 consisted of about six hundred acres of upland, salt marshes, and irregular mud flats. There were only about ten old families residing on the entire peninsula and the only connection with Boston was by small boats or rafts, unless back over the causeway and through Roxbury.

taken. Interests of Roxbury and the South End of Boston protested the bridge projects.

Dorchester most strenuously objected to the plan for annexation of "Great Neck", that portion from South Bay along Broadway to City Point. The proponents of the measure offered the Town of Dorchester as much as twenty thousand dollars not to oppose the Annexation Bill in the Legislature. Dorchester's even stubborn resistance in the face of almost sure defeat persisted and she not only lost the land but the money—bribe or "hush money" if you choose to call it—as well.

On March 6, 1804 "Great Neck" became part of the Town of Boston, afterwards known as Ward Twelve and South Boston. At the same time the "Boston South Bridge Act" was approved and a structure was built of wood at a cost of \$56,000 which was opened for travel on August 6, 1805. It was a Toll Bridge. Rates were from two cents for "hand carts, wheel-barrows" etc., to seventeen cents for "coaches, chariots, phaetons and curricles." Vessels passed through the draw free of toll, and at first the bridge corporation had to pay the masters of vessels five cents per rated ton for delay, expense, and inconvenience in navigating the narrow channel.

South Boston immediately began to develop into a residential and commercial district. The hills were cut down, and some streets were laid out and homes were built. As mud flats were filled in, wharves and warehouses soon followed. Ship building became active. Foundries, glass and chemical works were established.

Some well to do and progressive Boston citizens realized that the Town (until 1822) was not of sufficient size to properly grow into the commercial center expected for it. They foresaw that Dorchester Neck was the logical place for trade development and expansion, with residential prospects on the high land. They proceeded to purchase large tracts of land in that district. Among this group was William Tudor, Harrison Gray Otis, Gardiner Greene, Jonathan Mason, etc. As "Proprietors of Lands on Dorchester Neck," they petitioned the legislature in 1804 to annex that section to Boston, and for a connecting bridge location to be decided by said legislature. This latter move was necessary as no agreement could be reached satisfactory to the conflicting interests of the towns of Boston, Dorchester, and Roxbury. Several attempts to span across had been defeated by opponents, with the malicious destruction of various wooden structures partly permanent and partly floating that were under-

MORTGAGEE'S SALE

Under and by virtue of the power of sale contained in a certain mortgage of real estate given by Alexander Martin of Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts, to the Workingmens Co-operative Bank, a Massachusetts Corporation, with its usual place of business in said Boston, dated May 23, 1938, and recorded with Suffolk Deeds, Book 5729, page 85 for breach of the condition of said mortgage, and for the purpose of foreclosing the same, will be sold at public auction on the premises on Tuesday, February 7, 1939 at 2:10 o'clock in the afternoon, the real estate described in said mortgage, to wit:—"the land in said Boston, with the buildings thereon, situated on the Northeasterly side of Kendall Street, and being lot 11 on a plan made by S. Boles, Jr., Architect, dated July 1, 1863, and recorded with Suffolk Deeds, Book 834, page 18, bounded and described as follows: Beginning at a point distant about 278 feet, 8 inches Southerly from the Southerly side of Tre-

The South Bridge at our present Dover Street location was made a "Free Bridge," that is tolls were abolished, when it was sold to the City of Boston April 9, 1832. About two-hundred feet of it was filled in on the South Boston end in 1850 and the structure rebuilt in 1856 and 1877, as time and progress required better accommodations. The name was changed to Dover Street Bridge December 23, 1857. On February 25, 1825 in order to provide a more direct route to intown Boston, the "North Free Bridge Act" was passed and a private company incorporated. Various objections and difficulties delayed actual construction. It was not until September 26, 1828 that the "North Free Bridge" was built and opened by the city for public travel. This crossing was rebuilt in 1858 and an iron bridge constructed in 1873. All that remains of this "North Bridge", which was directly in line with the present Dorchester Avenue at West First Street, are some granite abutments near the railroad bascule bridge.

Some of the old timers will remember this location as the Federal Street Bridge (1857), when Atlantic Avenue by the South Station, over the bridge to Broadway, South Boston, was Federal Street. This was before the modern terminal was erected at the close of the last century. The bridge later called "Cove Street Bridge" was discontinued in 1915 when further terminal yard facilities and traffic congestion made it desirable to curve Dorchester Avenue around back of the South Station.

As the mud flats of South Boston were filled in Mount Washington Avenue (discontinued), Broadway, Summer Street, and Congress Street, bridges were erected to this old peninsula which was Dorchester Town's early "Great Pasture."

TO BE CONTINUED

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Its Construction and Development as Dorchester Avenue

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PART TWO:

Efefore the South Bridge was built in 1804 at Dover Street location, the only way for the people to get from Milton Lower Mills and the south east side of Dorchester into Boston by land was via the long, hilly, and circuitous route through Roxbury and over Boston Neck. Either the "Upper Road"—Washington and Warren Streets, or the "Lower Road"—Adams, Hancock and Dudley Streets, were travelled. After the completion of the bridge it was inaccessible to the residents of Lower Mills as several miles of marsh land intervened. Some capitalists joined forces and sold shares of stock in a corporation formed to build a Toll Turnpike direct from the Mills to this new bridge. The cost of the work was far in excess of the estimate and it was necessary to charge a toll considerably higher than anticipated. Some of the people believing that the project was somewhat of a "frameup" refused to use it, preferring to drive in through Roxbury rather than pay what they considered excessive toll. Comparatively little travel passed over it and the enterprise was a dismal failure to its financial sponsors. Those who hung on to their shares and others who purchased shares at a small fraction of their face value cashed in later when by private subscription the thor-

(Commercial) to Commercial Point and Port Norfolk; Savin Hill Avenue, "Leeds Lane"; and the Pond Street—Crescent Avenue crossing. Ashmont Street, Park Street, Columbia Road, etc. are of later origin.

In 1828 the portion in South Boston from the south end of the "North Bridge" to Dorchester Turnpike was known as "Turnpike Street." Toll gates were maintained at Fields Corner, Washington Village (Andrew Square) and near the Boston terminus. At first this roadway was rough and somewhat hilly with sections of the causeway type of construction. The hills were cut down, hollows filled, and widenings made from time to time as traffic increased.

One hundred years ago the public utility for human transportation over this highway was by stage coach, making one tip a day with a fare of fifty cents from Lower Mills to State and Broad Streets. Records of a century ago also show where the Town of Dorchester paid tolls on this turnpike for its vehicles.

The legislative act of 1844 incorporating the Old Colony Railroad limited the Boston terminus of this line to a South Boston location, which was on Dorchester Avenue, or The Turnpike. They were granted the next year, however, the rights and privilege to bridge the channel, or South Cove, and enter Boston proper. The old passenger de-

oughfare was purchased and made a free road.

What we know and travel over today in its far superior improved condition as Dorchester Avenue was laid out as the Dorchester-South Boston Turnpike shortly after the completion of the South Bridge in the summer of 1805. This provided a more direct route from the Old Colony settlements, and Braintree, Hingham, etc., via Milton. A new roadway was thus provided between the "Upper Road" which was hilly, and the "Lower Road" which was both hilly and over swampy lowlands often flooded by tidewater. The Turnpike crossed or intersected the few cross-streets then in existence, such as, Center Street or "The Way to Tileston's Mill"; Adams Street, "The Lower Country Way"; Freport Street,

PAUL G. COURTNEY APPOINTED RED CROSS TREASURER

Following a meeting of the board of directors of the Boston Metropolitan Chapter, American Red Cross, Chairman Joseph R. Hamlen announced the appointment of Paul G. Courtney, as Treasurer of that organization to succeed William H. Claffin, Jr., the latter having resigned after serving in this capacity for the past two years.

In commenting on the appointment, Chairman Hamlen stated: "Mr Courtney has been interested in the American Red Cross for many years and we are most fortunate in securing as our Treasurer a man so well qualified for this important office.

"Graduating from Harvard in the class of 1915, Mr Courtney is associated as Vice President, with Lee Higginson Corporation. During the world war

pot at "Southie" was used for some time after as a freight station.

In 1852 the Dorchester-Turnpike was surrendered as a Toll Highway by the Turnpike Corporation and the portion in South Boston from Fourth Street to Dorchester line was accepted by the City of Boston. "Turnpike Street" was first paved from Fourth Street to the North Free Bridge. In the Dorchester records of 1852 the Turnpike is first listed as a private street from Washington Street to South Boston line.

"Little Neck" or the Andrew Square section became Washington Village on March 4, 1850. On May 21, 1855 that portion of ancient Dorchester, having only two-hundred voters, was annexed to Boston.

"Turnpike Street" in 1854 became Dorchester Avenue and a public highway. The Dorchester Avenue Railroad Company was originally chartered as a "Horse Railroad" April 29, 1854. Grading commenced on the Avenue in 1856 and a single track with turnouts was first operated to Fields Corner November 27, 1856. This was, on June 29, 1857, extended to Center Street, and through to Lower Mills, June 1, 1859—fare 15c. The Metropolitan Railroad took over the line in 1863. On account of the stiff grades from Park Street to the Lower Mills "Dummy Engines", or small locomotives, took the place of horses over this stretch for several years. A turntable was located on the east side of Dorchester Avenue near Adams Street, Lower Mills, where the old electric car sheds were lately torn down. For a while "double decker" horse cars with spiral stairway at the rear were operated over this line.

Electric cars first replaced the horse ones as far as Fields Corner about 1890

and they gave way to busses in 1925.

Before Talbot Avenue was cut through in 1892-1893, the Ashmont Station of the Shawmut Branch steam railroad was located on the north side of Peabody Square. This site was at the corner of Dorchester Avenue and Argyle Street, part of Argyle being taken in as Talbot Avenue. This station location was later moved to the south side of the square where it was afterwards demolished for the present rapid transit station in 1928.

Many notable people, places, and events have been associated with this old Turnpike but my time and space are limited, so the end of this narrative has come.
