



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter June 2025

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 10th, 2:00 pm at the Dennis Memorial Library
1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village**

Members Welcome

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

Getting to Dennis

Soon after crossing the Sagamore Bridge, Charlie Thompson excitedly took the wheel of the family's 1949 Ford Custom.

As we read in his diary last month, it was July 7, 1950, and he and his family were headed to vacation in the family cottage in Dennis. Harry Truman was President, and the Korean Conflict was twelve days old.

From an article recently sent to me from DHS member, noted Cape Cod author, and now frequent contributor to our monthly newsletter, Jack Sheedy, we learn of Charlie Thompson's choices on how to get to Dennis and what came in the years to follow!



Sagamore Bridge from Scenic Highway, circa 1950—courtesy of Getty Images

Highway's History Stamped in Concrete

Years ago, prior to 1950, the preferred way of traveling across Cape Cod from the Sagamore Bridge to points east was by driving along what is known today as Route 6A. This picturesque road gracefully carries travelers through quaint villages across the northern portion of the peninsula, passing dwellings and churches along the way that date back centuries and which remind one of an earlier time. In fact, rather than a speedy trip from Point A to Point B, this route's beauty encourages drivers to slow down and take it all in.



Crow Farm in Sandwich



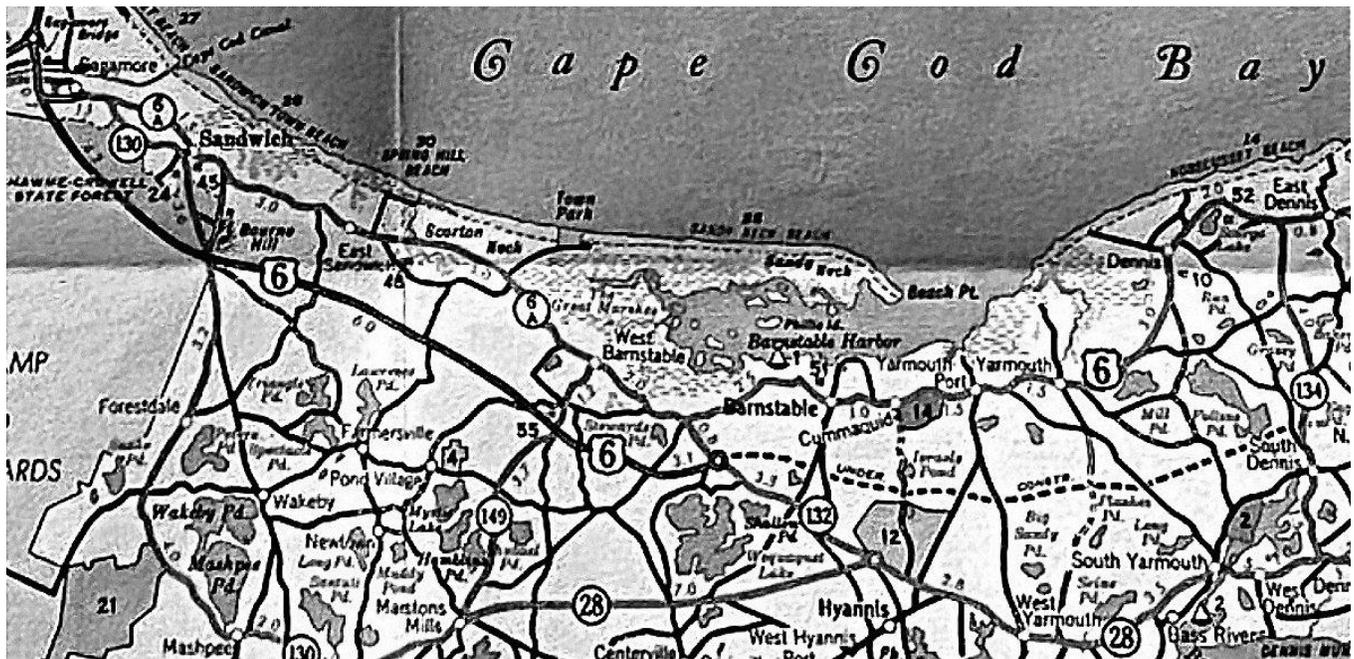
Crocker Tavern in Barnstable Village



Yarmouth Port

Images are from the US Department of Transportation.

Despite being a teenager and usually anxious to get places, this is the route which Charlie Thompson elected to take to Dennis. From the time he was a little boy, although interrupted during World War II by rationing, it was the way his family went. The new Mid-Cape Highway would have to wait for another day. After all, how could a family start its summer vacation without its traditions! Jack Sheedy gets it exactly right when he extols the beauty of what is now Route 6A.



1950s Tydol (Flying A) Cape Cod road map, courtesy of etsy.com

Yet, sometimes the ultimate goal is to get from Point A to Point B in the quickest way possible (keeping to the speed limit, of course). So, in the years after World War II, as the Cape's population grew and tourism picked up, plans commenced toward constructing a modern highway. In 1950, a significant stretch was completed between the Sagamore Bridge and West Barnstable, with one lane traveling in each direction. This roadway ended with a traffic rotary at the current Exit 68 (formerly Exit 6).

Within a few years, plans were developed to expand the highway. A second barrel was constructed between the canal bridge and the rotary, allowing for two lanes of traffic traveling both eastbound and westbound. Additionally, work was commenced toward extending the highway eastward into Yarmouth and then onward to Dennis. In fact, if you're driving along Old Bass River Road in South Dennis over the Mid-Cape Highway you will see that the year "1954" appears prominently in concrete at the northwest side of the bridge indicating the year of construction. This single barrel highway, with one lane running in each direction, was opened for travel in 1955.

The following year the highway was extended into Brewster, and by 1958 it arrived at Orleans. A rotary at the Orleans-Eastham town line was added. And that is pretty much how that stretch looks today, with a single lane traveling in each direction.

By the mid-1960s, with more and more people flocking to the Cape, plans were in place to double barrel the Mid-Cape Highway between Barnstable and Dennis. The July 21, 1966 issue of the Barnstable Patriot newspaper featured a front-page article with the headline, "Mid-Cape Double Barrel Work To Get Under Way Next Week." The article indicated that the project was "urged by Cape legislators, town officials and residents for the past several years as traffic has multiplied."

Although this second barrel did not ultimately extend all the way to Orleans, it did, as we know, make its way to Dennis. Today, the year "1969" appears on the southeast section of the overpass at Old Bass River Road – above the eastbound lanes of traffic – indicating the year of its completion. (Note: The dates "1954" and "1969" also appear on the overpass at North Main Street in Yarmouth, pointing to highway construction work during those years.)

Nowadays, we may not consider a trip along Route 6 from the Sagamore Bridge to Dennis as anything more than a paved conveyance delivering us from Point A to Point B. Yet, one cannot deny that this pitch pine-lined ribbon of asphalt is a uniquely Cape Cod stretch, bringing tourists mile-by-mile closer to the summer beaches, and bringing us locals closer and closer to the comfort of our year-round homes.

Thank you Jack!

Route 6, Cape Cod Timeline Recap

1950s: The initial two-lane section of Route 6 was built from the Sagamore Bridge to Hyannis, ending at a rotary (Exit 6), now 68.

1952-1955: The two-lane road was extended to Dennis (Exit 9), now 78.

1954: The highway was widened to four lanes from the Cape Cod Canal to Exit 6.

1956-1958: The two-lane road was extended through Harwich and Brewster to the rotary in Orleans.

1966-1971: The four-lane road was extended from Exit 6 to Dennis (Exit 9).

1970s: The two-lane highway was upgraded from Dennis to Orleans. Called the “Super 2”, it included the addition of a medium berm and reflectors. Plans for a parallel roadway to make the road four lanes were abandoned due to environmental concerns.

1980s: There were again efforts to widen Route 6 to four lanes from Dennis to the Orleans rotary, but these were not pursued due to local opposition, resource and the same environmental concerns.

Ongoing: Route 6 has been the subject of various improvement projects, including widening, median installations, and improvements to interchanges and intersections, particularly on the Outer Cape.

It was my intention to include numerous pictures of Route 6 under construction to accompany Jack’s article. Amazingly, there were none to be found! Although there were many taken during the construction of the Sagamore, Bourne and the railroad bridges between 1935 and 1938, for some reason the vital Cape Cod transportation artery was extremely camera shy. I did find a post card image from the 1950s showing the highway looking east when it was just two lanes. Entitled 205: - *General View of Mid-Cape Highway, Cape Cod, Mass. 50424*. With the aid of more recent photos and comparing the bridge and the off ramp, the postcard shows the Quaker Meeting House Exit, formerly Exit 3, now Exit 61...note the oncoming traffic and the broken centerline for passing on the straight away.

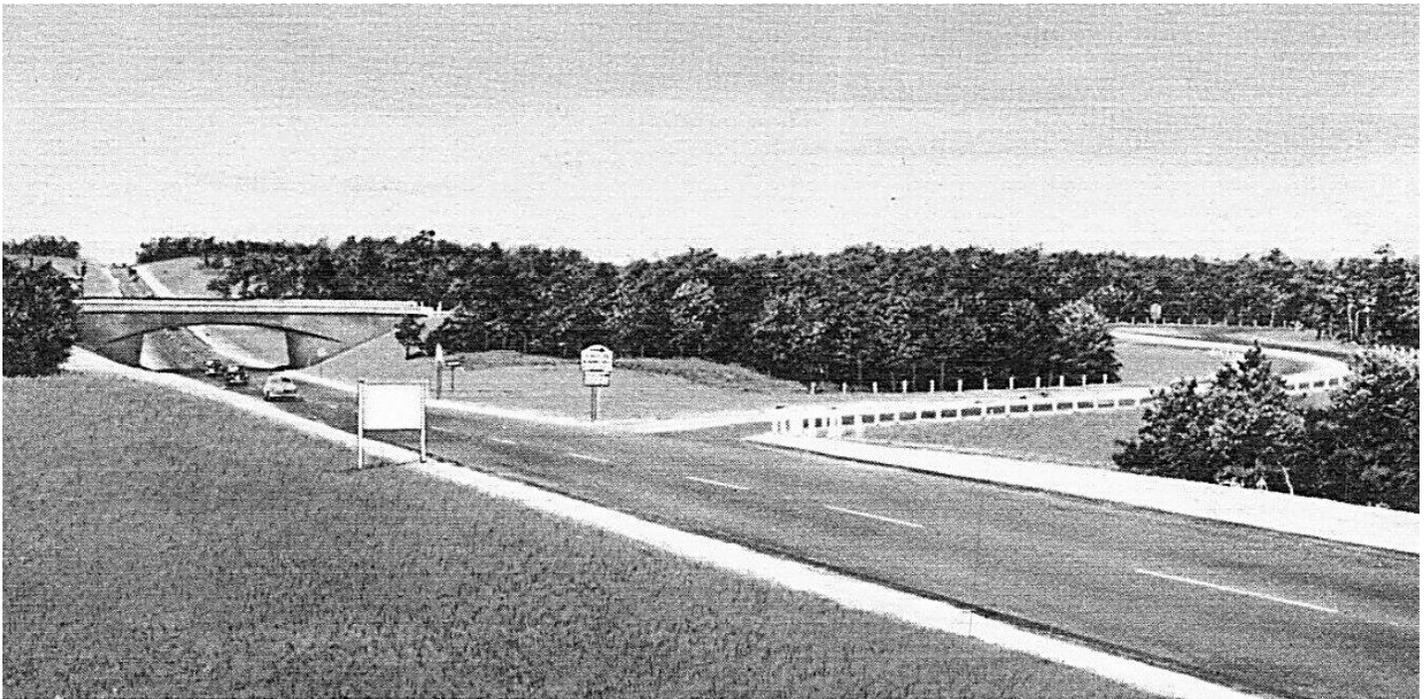


Image from the “In My Footsteps” Podcast Blog by Christopher Setterland



Courtesy of the Getaway Mavens

Did You Know?

Route 6 stretches all the way from Long Beach, CA to Provincetown, MA. Or, as I prefer to put it, from Provincetown to Long Beach, CA!



Courtesy U.S. Route 6 Tourist Assoc.

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REMEMBERING

Elizabeth Reynard and Virginia Gildersleeve
Saviors of the 1801 Theophilus Baker House



"JERICHO"
THIS OLD DENNIS HOUSE
WAS GIVEN IN 1925 TO THE
TOWN OF DENNIS
AS AN HISTORICAL CENTER
BY A LOVER OF CAPE COD.
Elizabeth Reynard
WIFE OF
THE NARROW LAND
FROM CHURCHVILLE IN 1801 TO 1811
THE MUTINIOUS WIND
A SUNDAY'S TALK - 1891
Dr. Virginia Gildersleeve



Exhibit opening Saturday, June 21, 1-4 pm
Captain Baker House, 90 Old Main Street, West Dennis

Visit thereafter: Tuesdays/Thursdays, 1 - 4pm, through August 28

JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE GRAND OPENING JUNE 28



CELEBRATING DENNIS HISTORY ALL SUMMER LONG

Enjoy historic coverlets, silk rugs, antiques, and Revolutionary War
history from the Dennis Historical Society's permanent collection

61 WHIG STREET IN DENNIS VILLAGE

Opening for the Season: Saturday, June 28, 1 - 4 pm
Then Thursdays/Saturdays 1 - 4 pm through September 13

TREASURES FROM THE DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEW EXHIBIT THIS SUMMER

DENNIS MARITIME MUSEUM AT THE
1867 WEST DENNIS GRADED SCHOOLHOUSE
67 SCHOOL STREET, WEST DENNIS

MUSEUM OPENING SATURDAY, JUNE 28, 10 AM - 4 PM
THEN OPEN WEDNESDAY & FRIDAY, 1 - 4 PM, THROUGH AUGUST 29
FREE ADMISSION/ WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE

The Museums Open for the 2025 Season this Month!
Mark Your Calendars - Don't Miss These Events!