

The Boston Post Road

~ Traffic ~

Early colonists began to use the Indian trails for foot travel between their settlements. The paths became wider as they began to use horses on the trails.

In the 1700s, as colonial settlements grew into small villages, carts and wagons moved between them with their heavy loads.

Regular stagecoach travel could be accomplished between Boston and New York by the mid 1740s, but the journey was an uncomfortable one. In the summer, dust filled the inside of the coach, and those who chose to draw the curtains to shut it out had to bear the heat. In the winter, the rain and snow seeped in. Long waits for river ferries might occur. A trip out of Boston might begin as early as 3:00 am and stay on the road for seventeen hours and sixty miles. A short night would then be spent at a crowded inn with two or more to a bed. The next day was more of the same.

By 1750, alternate routes had developed which are preserved in today's transportation patterns.

Sailing ships remained the primary mode of transportation between the colonies well into the 1750s.

The *King's Highway* (of which the *Boston Post Road* was a part) became the mustering point for several of the Revolutionary War battles, including the final battle at Yorktown.

Long before travelers reached New York City, they would pass large numbers of vehicles: farmers with wagon loads of produce, teamsters carting in water, young men taking their ladies out for a drive in one-horse chaises.

By 1850, parts of the southern road were taken over for the track bed of the train connecting Boston to New York City, and the road moved over alongside it.

~ Features ~

Few people other than the post-riders were acquainted with the early *Boston Post Road*. Anyone leaving Boston made it a point to travel with a post-rider. A lady of courage by the name of Sarah Knight made the journey and recorded her impressions in her journal in 1704. Poor food at the inns was the least of her problems. Perhaps the most frightening was the fording of the river during the night's darkness.

In keeping with the King's wishes, the old post routes eventually became the *King's Highway*. By 1750, a continuous road existed for stagecoach or wagon traffic from Boston down to Charleston, South Carolina, or at least during good weather.

Referring to the road as the *King's Highway* came into disfavor during the Revolutionary War. Along many sections of this route today in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York, the name *Boston Post Road* is still used. The modern highway is Interstate 95, but parallel side roads still exist with the old name.

As citizens of the new nation sought increasing travel, more and better inns were constructed along the way. Some of these and still earlier taverns still exist. Fairfield, CT, and Worcester, MA were both known to have several pleasant inns for tired and hungry travelers.

As the stage driver approached a tavern, he would sound his horn to announce to the tavern-keeper that hungry passengers were arriving. In the late 1700s, these meals might be true feasts. John Adams is quoted as having enjoyed a meal of "ducks, ham, chickens, beef, pig, tarts, creams, custards, jellies, fools, trifles, floating islands, beer, porter, punch, wine and a long etc."

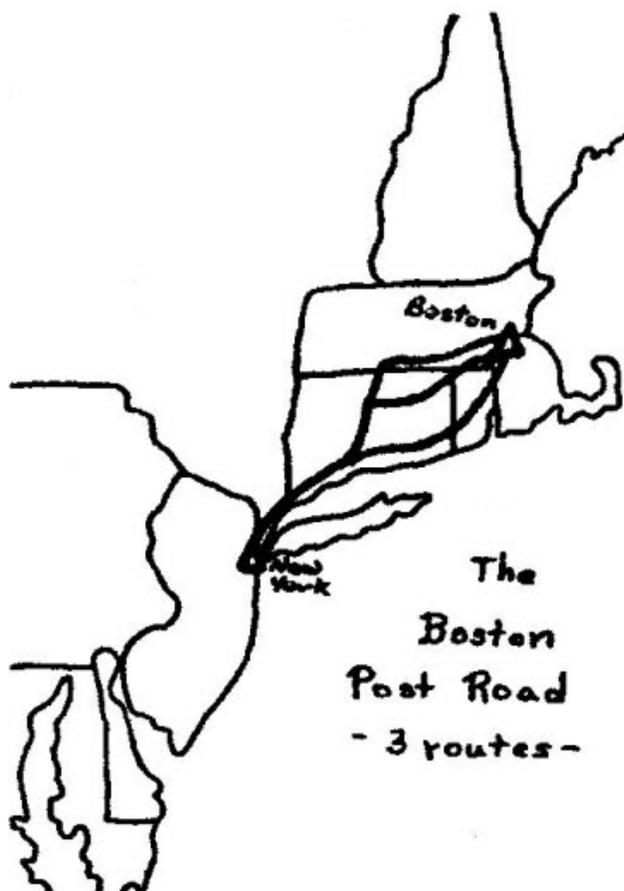
For a portion of a stage journey over particularly rocky roads, the carriage would be replaced by a crude wagon without springs. This was a safety factor since a carriage with springs would have turned over and crashed. And where the traffic was known to be light, passengers might be transferred to a chariot drawn by only two horses—an economy factor.

Springfield, MA, was an important junction point. This was where the traders' trail came in from Albany, the colonial fur center.

The Connecticut Valley seemed to be the safest and most beautiful part of the trip between Boston and New York.

~ Timeline ~
The Boston Post Road

- 1664 King Charles informs his governors in New York and New England that he would be pleased to have communication established between his colonies.
- 1673 A crude riding trail is created to carry mail from New York to Boston; it becomes known as the Boston Post Road. The first postrider's round trip takes four weeks. It is a journey of over 250 miles--first along the Connecticut River to Springfield, and then along the New Connecticut Path to Worcester, and on to Boston. (The Upper Northern Route.)
- 1704 Sarah Knight travels from Boston to New York City on the southern trail, accompanying a postrider as her guide.
- 1753 With Benjamin Franklin as Deputy Postmaster for the Colonies, the Post Roads play an important part in binding the colonies together.
- 1772 The first stagecoach in service makes the trip between Boston and New York City in just one week.
- 1775-1781 During the Revolutionary War, the Post Roads are used for maneuvering soldiers and equipment. Stagecoach service and the mail take second place.
- 1785 With the war over, the Post Roads are important links between the states of the new nation. Sections of the road are improved.



Routes of the Boston Post Road

**Lower route (Southern)
270 miles long**

Boston, MA
 Dedham, MA
 Providence, RI
 Mystic, CT
 New London, CT
 New Haven, CT
 Fairfield, CT
 Greenwich, CT
 Rye, NY
 Kingsbridge, NY
 New York City

**Middle Route
225 miles long**

Boston, MA
 Dedham, MA
 Putnam, CT
 Hartford, CT
 New Haven, CT
 Fairfield, CT
 Greenwich, CT
 Rye, NY
 New York City

**Upper Route
(Northern)
250 miles long**

Boston, MA
 Cambridge, MA
 Sudbury, MA
 Worcester, MA
 Spencer, MA
 Wilbraham, MA
 Springfield, MA
 Hartford, CT
 Wethersfield, CT
 Middletown, CT
 New Haven, CT
 Fairfield, CT
 Greenwich, CT
 Rye, NY
 New York City