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The Way It Was

7300 words (Macadamize Rehoboth Roads)

**One Hundred Years of “Macadamizing” Rehoboth Roads,
From Mud, Ruts, and Dust to Asphalt Pavemen, 1880 to 1980**

Early Rehoboth Roads

Over one hundred years ago at the beginning of the last century, Rehoboth roads were still unpaved, dusty and dirty in summer, and muddy and rutted during winter thaws and when the frost came out of the ground in the spring. According to an article in the January 3, 1884 *Providence Journal* newspaper,

“The traveling in this town [Rehoboth] has been exceedingly poor. The thaw of last week came before the snow was thoroughly trodden and then with the freezing, the roads became very rough and many sleigh runners were broken, five of such mishaps occurring in one day.”¹

Equally concerned about the condition of the Rehoboth roads were the members of the *Rehoboth Farmers Club*. At an evening meeting of the club a few weeks later, on February 27, one speaker made specific recommendations:

“Town Clerk W. H. Luther gave a brief history of road making and then gave his views on the best method of improving the roads and the requisites of good highways, among which was good drainage. To accomplish this, roads [pavements] should be at least 20 feet wide and raised in the middle by at least 18 inches. There are about 100 miles of roads in Rehoboth [actually about 120 miles at that time], and gravel has to be frequently carted one or two miles ... the right men should be chosen for [highway] surveyors. He thought improvements had been made in the roads over the last 20 years.”

Luther had the right idea, but he wouldn't live long enough to see it carried out, as it would take eighty years of political bickering in the town meeting to decide whose road should be improved by graveling or paving.

¹My mother, Alice Dexter Dyer, recalled that when she was about eight in 1899 and living at Briggs corner, Attleboro, her father, Everett O. Dexter, asked her on a cold afternoon in January, if she wanted to accompany him in his sleigh to visit his mother (her grandmother, Maria Dexter) living on our farm at 371 Fairview Avenue. Because it was a blustery day, both bundled up in buffalo robes, Dexter chose the more sheltered "warm-route" through the woods on Fairview Avenue, rather than over the more frequently traveled Tremont and Anawan Streets to avoid the wind-swept farm fields along those two roads. On Fairview Avenue the snow and ice was so rough and "cut-up" by sleds and sleighs and freezes and thaws that the sleigh over-turned near what is now the Red Fox Club. Fortunately, their horse didn't bolt and run-off with the sleigh, leaving them stranded in the middle of no-where. Dexter was able to up-right the sleigh, but discouraged by the mishap, turned around and went home.

Forty-five years later in the mid 1920s, many Rehoboth roads were still in poor condition. Earl Goff on Anawn Street, grandfather of the present Earl Goff living on Perryville Road, recalled that while delivering the RFD mail on Fairview Avenue in the mid 1920s, he got his car hopelessly stuck in the mud a little east of the bridge over the East Branch of the Palmer River, and about the same time, while Marshal Fisher, Sr. and his wife were moving their furniture out from East Providence to their new home in Rehoboth near Devil's Pond, they got their truck in the mud on the hill on Wilmarth Bridge Road between Pond Street and the Palmer River. To free the truck, the Fishers had to unload all the furniture and load it back on again. Over the next forty years the town made some improvements to Fairview Avenue, but still, in the mid 1960s, the road was only one-car wide in places and so stony and crooked that it was a novelty to see a car go by my house at 371 Fairview Avenue. When one did on a dry summer day, I could see it coming from afar by the cloud of dust trailing behind it.

Since the farmers in town did most of their heavy hauling by horse or ox-drawn sleds in winter when the roads were snowy and frozen and avoided using them during the mud season in the spring. They could tolerate the poor roads, but the early motorists could not. Finding that the poor roads were injurious to their cars, they pressured the state and county to assist the towns with financial and technical aid to make road improvements, the beginning of our Chapter 81 and Chapter 90 state and county highway aid programs that still assist the towns in maintaining and rebuilding their roads to this day.

In 1880 the town had 120 miles of gravel and dirt roads to maintain, improve, and "macadamize" (pave). Over the next 70 years until the early 1950s, there were many political squabbles in the town meeting over whose road would be improved next and it would take another twenty years after that, when road improvements were under the direction of the Selectmen, to widen and pave most of the rest of Rehoboth's roads to a minimum standard of a forty foot wide layout and twenty foot wide pavement. Before that, up to the end of World War II, most improvements, with the exception of "Chapter 90 roads," were limited to the spreading of gravel over the roughest and muddiest places and when they were paved, the pavement was rarely more than fifteen feet, allowing barely enough room for two cars to pass each other.

The First "Macadamized " Roads in Rehoboth

One-hundred years ago in 1917, the Reverend George H. Tilton wrote in his *History of Rehoboth* that Winthrop Street, the main highway through town, was the first road to be paved in Rehoboth. He noted that

In the spring of the year there would be long stretches of mud [on Winthrop Street] and travel was difficult. In 1895 about a mile of the road was [laid out and] macadamized by the State in Rehoboth, beginning at the Seekonk town line and running east. Little by little with many breaks and long delays, the improvement was extended until in 1908, after thirteen years, it was essentially completed [5.5 miles]. It is now [1917] a fine hard road, which automobiles and other vehicles are continually passing. Other roads in Rehoboth have also been greatly improved.

The Reverend Tilton may have been referring to Broad Street when he wrote that “other roads in Rehoboth have also been improved.” As the reconstruction of Winthrop Street was nearing completion at Wheeler’s corner, the corner of New Street and Winthrop Street, in 1907, a Rehoboth town meeting voted to reconstruct and “macadamize “ a three-quarter mile segment of Broad Street between today’s Hass farm at the corner of Broad Street and Pine Street and the Seekonk town line. Why the town voted to pave only that section of Broad Street and leave the remaining one-half mile of road between Pine Street and Winthrop Street a dirt road for the next thirty years is not known, but most likely it was because William Viall, a successful dairy farmer and well-known personage in town, who lived where Hasses live now, wanted that section of Broad Street paved to facilitate his travel back and forth between his house and his East Providence dairy. Viall was able to persuade enough of his friends to come to the town meeting to vote for the improvement, the beginning of a very common practice, known as “packing the town meeting.” Sometimes the “packing” worked and sometimes it didn’t.

About the same time, when the “Hornbine people” led by Nathaniel Horton, another successful farmer and another well-known personage in town, and his son, Adin B. Horton, town treasurer, tried the same thing by asking the town “to "macadamize" the road [Hornbine Road] from the Swansea line to the Hornbine Church [at Baker Road].” They failed to get enough support, and their article failed to pass; so they had to put up with another sixteen years of dust and mud until 1923, when that section of the Hornbine

Road was paved as part of a state-aid omnibus road improvement that included the reconstruction of sections of Moulton, County, and Providence Streets.

Since the reconstruction of Broad Street in 1907 was a major project beyond the capabilities of Rehoboth's highway department, the state contracted the work out to Joseph McCormick, a well-known reliable road contractor from East Providence for \$1200. That amount of money went a long way in 1907, as even a fraction of a penny had value in those days. McCormick paid his "pick- and-shovel-men" 16- 2/3 cents per hour and hired a double team of horse-drawn construction equipment for 42-2/9 cents per hour and a steam roller, the first piece of mechanized equipment to be used on Rehoboth Roads, for \$1.00 per hour.

Highway Surveyors, Commissioners, and Superintendents

It took the town fifty years, between 1880 and 1930, to find the proper way to supervise, maintain, and reconstruct the town roads. The town was then very sectionalized from north to south, as each neighborhood wanted to control the money spent on improving their roads and bridges, just as they wanted to control the patronage connected to their one-room schools. In 1880 the town had an unwieldy number of twenty-one highway surveyors, all elected and working under the direction of a head surveyor and the three selectmen. Each surveyor was responsible for the maintenance and repair of all the bridges and about six miles of road in his neighborhood. After finding this to be an unwieldy system, in 1897 the town cut the number of surveyors to three: Paschal Wilmarth, a farmer on Broad Street, had District # 1, the south end of town; Bradford G. Goff, a farmer on Maple Lane, has District #2, the center of town; and George Hathaway Goff, a farmer on New Street, had District #3, the north end of town. Still not satisfied, a few years later in 1903, the town increased the number of highway surveyors to six, and a few years later they went full circle back to having twenty-one surveyors and districts, as they had in 1880. Finding that arrangement worked no better than it had before, in the early 1920s the town went to the other extreme and replaced all of its twenty-one surveyors with just one man, an elected Highway Superintendent, a.k.a. Highway Commissioner. This gave the Superintendent control over the patronage of his department and the increased spending on town roads that was beginning at about this time. It made the position very political.

Highway Department Politics, 1924

Since the Highway Superintendent was elected and not appointed, he ran his department independently of the selectmen and was answerable only to the voters at the town meeting. The superintendent could chose whom he hired, from where he bought his materials, and control how the work was done, thus making the position politically important to the town's hierarchy, a.k.a. the "royal family," who ran the town. Edward E. Goff on Locust Avenue in the village was the elected superintendent -commissioner during all of the 1920s. Though Goff was of one the "royal family" and thus the favored person to run the highway department, he was not immune to political interference from the selectmen, who wanted the patronage for themselves. Goff had been commissioner for only a few years when a disagreement arose in 1924 between him and the selectmen over how long it was taking Goff to complete a section of road work. The selectmen, saying that they could do the road work more efficiently than Goff, persuaded the voters at the annual town meeting in March to "water-down" Goff's authority by passing three articles in the March 1924 town meeting:

1. To abolish the present highway system
2. To elect two Highway Surveyors in place of a Road Commissioner
3. To decree that if the Road Commissioner [Goff] cannot build any road for which money has been appropriated, the Selectmen are instructed to expend said money.

Perhaps the selectmen were sincere and truly thought that they could do the highway work better than Goff, but more likely it was ploy for them to gain more control over the growing highway appropriations. Under the new arrangement, if Goff was elected to one of the new positions, he would have to share its duties with another commissioner, and they both would have the Selectmen hovering over them, threatening to step in and spend the road appropriation money themselves. The voters, however, having second thoughts, three months later at a special town meeting in May, voted to, "to retain the present system of our Road Commissioner." After that failure, the selectmen backed off from any further interference with running the highway department until 1930, when Goff announced his retirement as the Highway Superintendent-Commissioner.

The Election of 1930

After Goff chose to retire as Highway Superintendent. in 1930, the town's ruling faction, concerned over keeping control over who was elected to this important patronage position, ran their favored candidate, George W. Carpenter, also a member of the "royal family," and the owner of the Carpenter homestead, a dairy farm on Bay State Road (demolished in 2017). However, "outsiders" from north Rehoboth, seeing it as an opportunity to elect one of their own, ran Clarence Vickery, a young excavating contractor living on Park Street near the Attleboro town line, as Highway Superintendent. The lead-up to the election was politically heated and even more so on the day of the election. Back then tellers were allowed to begin counting ballots in blocks of fifty while the polls were still open. There was not supposed to be any communication between the tellers, who were working inside the polls, and the spectators standing in the hall by the door looking in, but in reality the poll workers would signal to their friends in the hall how their candidate was doing in the ballot count by a prearranged set of coded signals. A pull of the right ear might mean their candidate was ahead in the count, or a pull of the left ear meant he wasn't doing well. When Carpenter's backers received notice that Carpenter was over fifty votes behind Vickery, they alerted their "runners" to bring in the sick, tired, infirm and shut-ins to boost up Carpenter's votes. Vickery thought he was doing well, until Charles Smith, town treasurer, who lived in a house now long gone beside where Cumberland Farms store is now at the Anawan corner, told Vickery, "You are ahead in the count, but your opponents are telling people not to vote for you, that you are a crazy young kid. They are getting out every Tom, Dick, and Harry they can to vote against you." The polls closed at 6:00 pm, despite requests by Vickery and his supporters that the polls stay open to 8:00 pm to give the north Rehoboth people, who were mostly factory workers in Attleboro, time to get home and vote. Most of Carpenter's supporters were farmers, who could vote during the day. Vickery lost the election by three votes. To avoid a similar situation next year, the hierarchy persuaded the next annual town meeting to give the selectmen the authority to appoint the highway superintendent, something they had wanted for years. Although the town election of 1930 had been highly contested,

apparently there was little if any animosity between the winners and losers, as the selectmen and Carpenter continued to hire Vickery's dump truck and excavating equipment as often as they used other contractors' equipment. George W. Carpenter held the highway superintendent's position through all the 1930s and 1940s until he retired in 1949, when the Selectmen appointed Victor Fredette of Williams Street superintendent. It was under Fredette's twenty year tenure that the town made the final push to complete the widening and paving of almost all the town roads to standard specifications.

Graveling and "Macadamizing," Rehoboth Roads, 1920 to 1950

During this period, the improvements and maintenance of Rehoboth's secondary back roads were financed by the Chapter 81 state-aid program and town meeting appropriations, while the reconstruction of the town's more important thoroughfares, such as Providence Street and Anawan Street, were paid for and more carefully constructed under the state Chapter 90 program, in which the state, county, and town each paid a third of the cost. The Chapter 90 contractors worked under the supervision of the state highway engineers and used some of the first road construction equipment that was coming out: steam shovels and rollers, small dump trucks, pneumatic drills and cement mixers, while the men working in the highway department men under the Chapter 81 program continued to use more "pick-and-shovel" type of hand labor and horse-drawn construction equipment. Many of the Chapter 90 roads built during this period are still in use today, while many of the Chapter 81 roads had to be done over under more strident specifications.

Two of the first Chapter 90 road reconstruction projects, begun in 1921, were to eliminate the two ninety-degree turns in County Street at Maple Street by realigning the road through the John Earle farm. This required moving the antique Earle house to the other side of County Street at the corner of Maple Street to where it is today, and continuing the building of a "permanent highway" on Providence Street between Wood Street and Pleasant Street, then a dirt road. At about the same time the town voted to discontinue two seldom-used roads that were little more than cart paths through the woods with no houses on them: Sprague Road between Anawan Street and Fairview Avenue and Rocky Hill Road from the top of the hill near Danforth Street to Homestead Avenue. The latter abandonment had a strange stipulation attached to the end of it: "if the

selectmen see fit.” The Selectmen didn’t “see fit,” as Rocky Hill Road was never discontinued and by 1939 sections at both ends had been paved, but leaving the mid-section north of Holmes Street a narrow dirt road winding through the woods, not plowed during the winter and barely passable during the summer, until the Adams Farm subdivision was built on it circa 2000. In contrast, now the road has some of Rehoboth’s most expensive homes on it.

Many of the roads improved under Chapter 81 and the town’s road-program were built piecemeal and to substandard specifications. The emphasis was not on paving, but graveling the roughest and muddiest places, and when paved, the pavements were often only thirteen or fifteen feet in width, barely allowing enough room to allow two cars to pass each other, rather than the twenty foot minimum width of today. As late as 1964, there were two blind curves on Fairview Avenue east of Anawan Street where the road was only one-car wide. There were, however, few accidents there, because the road was so rough and stony, motorists had to drive over it, slowly. ²

Early Construction Equipment

Up into the 1930s, the town continued to use mostly horse-drawn construction equipment, such as scrapers, small graders, one yard capacity tip-carts, and "pick-and-shovel" hand labor for road work. In 1923 the town voted to pay laborers 40 cents an hour, about the same pay that WPA laborers got during the Great Depression, and \$7.00 per day for a double team of horses and a tip-cart. About 1929 some mechanized equipment was used along with the horses and laborers. The town bought a gas-powered roller for \$5,000 and hired the first dump trucks to haul gravel and stone, but a few tip-carts were still in use into the mid-1940s, probably because of gas rationing during the war.

² The last collision at the narrow blind curve by “mad dog rock” near 333 Fairview Avenue occurred in 1954, but it was not between two cars but between a horse and wagon and a car driven by Marshall Fisher, Sr. living on Pond Street. Fisher, driving westerly around the curve, collided with a horse and wagon driven by Herby Moore, a teen age boy, going in the opposite direction. The collision caused minor damage to Fisher’s car and the horse to bolt, throwing Herby back into the wagon bed where he bounced around unable to get back on the seat. The horse, unrestrained, raced down the road toward my house at 371 Fairview Avenue. I could hear them coming from afar by the noise the wagon made jouncing over the rough gravel road. I jumped into my car, drove quickly down my driveway, and parked it across the road, blocking it off. As the horse approached me at a gallop and showed no signs of stopping, I backed out of his way just in time to let him go by. It did, however, slow him down enough to allow Herby to get up, grab the reins, and stop the horse. Herby emerged from the bed of the wagon, shaken and bruised but otherwise unhurt. It may have been the last run-away horse and wagon episode in Rehoboth, once a very common occurrence.

The Highway Department Hires Its First Dump Truck

Horace Smith of Francis Street and later Winthrop Street is credited for introducing the first dump truck for town road work in 1929. The town highway department had begun improving a stretch of Providence Street by hauling gravel with horse-drawn tip-carts from Frank Cardoza's farm on Pleasant Street, now the Middlebrook Country Club, and spreading it on a new road surface on Providence Street. At Cardoza's, a gang of six laborers loaded gravel on to the tip-carts by hand and a few more men were out at the new road, spreading the gravel out with shovels as it arrived. Because the process was slow, the laborers at both ends had plenty of time to rest between loads. Smith's offer to haul gravel in his newly acquired Model T Ford dump truck at the same rate of pay as the tip-carts was accepted by the highway department. The superiority of the little truck over the horse and tip-cart was soon evident. Although Smith's truck had the same capacity as the tip-carts, about 1 cubic yard, the truck sped over the roads six times faster than a horse, thus allowing Smith to haul 48 loads of gravel to a tip-cart's eight in a day. The highway department was pleased, as for the same rate of pay, it was getting six times as much gravel, but the laborers at the Cardoza gravel bank were not happy, because by the end of the day they were exhausted from trying to keep up with the dump truck. Smith basically ended the tip-cart era in the highway department. Within a short time, eleven tip-cart owners had replaced their tip-carts with dump trucks and made them available for use for the highway department. As one thing often leads to another, the town had to purchase another piece of gas-powered equipment, a loader-conveyor, to assist the men loading gravel into the trucks. The men grading and leveling the gravel by hand out on the new road, however, were given no assistance, so to keep up with the trucks and keep their shoveling down to a minimum, they would direct the truck drivers to dump their loads as evenly as possible over the new road bed. By 1934, the highway department was using eleven dump trucks and five tip-carts to haul gravel.

Improving Roads, 1930 to 1950

During this period the two main issues in the town meeting were how to improve our schools, the same as today, and whose road should be improved next. Each year the town meeting warrant was deluged with articles requesting road improvements, with most

articles asking for a \$500 to \$3000 appropriation. Tempers flared and there was a lot of squabbling over whose road article should be approved. When Ivory Kimball of 44 Mason Street, the owner of Hawkswood dairy farm and known for still traveling around town in a horse and buggy, complained at a town meeting about the size of the mud-hole in front of his house, Frank Cardoza, a farmer on Pleasant Street, where the Middlebrook Country Club is now, got up and said, "There is a mud hole in front of my house on Pleasant Street large enough to bury Ivory Kimball, his horse and buggy, and more."

As usual, those with the most political muscle won out, resulting in some unusual-looking roads. Some sections were paved and the others not. In one such case, after making several unsuccessful attempts, one influential farmer succeeded in having a 1000 foot length of road paved running by his house through his farm, but in order to use it in either direction, a motorist he had to drive over a mile of some of the worst dirt and gravel roads in town. Coming upon that paved section in the middle of nowhere was like coming upon an oasis in the middle of a desert.

The number of petitions for road improvements in the 1930 town meeting was typical for all the town meetings held during the 1930s and 40s. In 1930 there were twenty-six requests for road improvements of which only seven were approved:

- 1) Blanding Road: voted to remove the rocks, straighten, and gravel Blanding Road, one-half of the money to be spent north of the pike and the other one-half, south of the pike.
- 2) Brook Street: voted \$500 to repair the road from Santos farm to Peckham Street.
- 3) Chestnut Street: voted \$1000 to tar the road from the hill in front of Otis Nichols house [now owned by his gr. grandson Earl Nichols, Jr. at County Street] to Mt. Terrydiddle [note, part of this road is now part of Moulton Street].
- 4) Fairview Avenue: voted to continue to improve [add gravel] from where we left off last year, [going] south. [this section would be near the Red Fox Club].
- 5) Smith Street: voted \$500 to gravel Smith Street from Tremont Street to the Attleboro line]. Mr. [Hyman] Fine will give the gravel. [Hymie Fine is the father of Ruth Fine Handy, who still runs the Fine farm and corn crib vegetable stand at Stevens corner, the corner of Tremont and Anawan Streets, with her husband, George Handy].
- 6) Tremont Street: voted \$500 to continue to gravel Tremont Street from Oak Knoll Cemetery to the Perry School at Agricultural Avenue], 15 feet wide.,
- 7) Reservoir Avenue, Kelton and Gorham Streets: voted to repair the "bad places" in those roads. [Note Kelton and Gorham Streets were not fully paved until sometime after 1939 and Reservoir Avenue was not paved by Bad Luck pond until the 1960s. •

[□]May Violette Moody Lamana, who grew up in the early 1900s at the Anawan Club's farm house on 68 Gorham Street, wrote in a memoir of childhood that "Gorham Street was a slippery mass of mud during the spring thaw or after a heavy downpour. If you were lucky you'd be near a neighbor's farm when you got [your car] stuck and he'd pull you out with his horses or oxen. See *The Anawan Club As We Knew It*, page 10, RAS Carpenter Museum newsletter, July/August 2009

Despite a concerted effort by the town and state during the 1930s to pave some roads, in 1939 there were still 57 miles of dirt and gravel roads in Rehoboth, divided about equally between the north and south sides of Winthrop Street. By 1949, there were so many requests for roads improvement on the town meeting warrant that the Finance Committee in their annual report for that year advised:

...we are confronted with [so many] special articles as those pertaining to highways [that] after careful consideration and in view of the horrible tax rate that we would have to face if all the these special articles go through as presented, totaling \$51,500, we the Finance Committee feel and hope our recommendations will meet the approval of the petitioners for \$42,000 to be appropriated or 20% less under the totals of the specials... This does not mean that all we have to spend on highways is \$42,000, plus our \$9,000 Chapter 81 money, we will be subsidized by the State to \$27,000 plus \$5,000 for Chapter 90, making this a grand total of highway expenditures of approximately, \$90,000.

Following the Finance Committee's advice, the 1950 town meeting voted to "raise \$42,000 for surfacing and maintaining town ways in 1950, until the money runs out." In that year there were twenty requests for road improvements:

- 1) A request to pave Martin Street, beginning at Caron's, petition of Frank Almeida, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 2) A request to pave Summer Street, beginning at "finish point" [Marshall Fisher's grave bank at the corner of Wilmarth Bridge Road], petition of John Andrade, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 3) A request to straighten Summer Street to eliminate the dangerous curve between School Street and Locust Avenue, \$2000, petition of George Halliwell, not approved by the Finance Committee
- 4) A request to gravel and tar Water Street, starting at Philip Phillips, going towards Wheeler Street, \$2000, petition of George Chapell, II, not approved by the Finance Committee
- 5) A request to improve Reservoir Avenue at the earliest possible date, \$2000, petition of William Duffy, not approved by the Finance Committee. [This request was to resurface only the Long Hill section on Reservoir Avenue].
- 6) A request to gravel Winter Street, starting at School Street and tarring the same, petition of Vimar Kindberg, \$1500, not approved by the Finance Committee
- 7) A request to gravel and tar Pine Street, starting at Henry Jenkinson, \$4000, petition of Manual Amaral, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 8) A request to gravel and tar Reservoir Avenue, beginning at Gorham Street, \$3000, petition of Oman Thayer, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 9) A request to tar Wheeler Street from French Street to Summer Street about 3/10 of a mile, \$2000, petition of Gabrielle Herbner, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 10) A request to gravel and tar Fairview Avenue from Homestead Avenue going towards Anawan Street
- 11) A request to gravel and tar Chestnut Street from Ingram's going to Byron Gifford's, \$3000, petition of Henry Ingram, not approved by the Finance Committee
- 12) A request to gravel and tar Willard Avenue, starting at Providence Street toward Fred Recore, \$3000, petition of George Sarkisian, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 13) A request to gravel and tar Reynolds Avenue from Tremont Street towards Mr. Reynolds' farm, \$3000, petition of Joseph Letourneau, not approved by the Finance Committee
- 14) A request to gravel and tar Horbine Road from William Pierce and continue north, \$3000, petition of, not approved by the Finance Committee
- 15) A request to gravel and tar Salisbury Street, starting at Marion DeAmaral toward William Jones, \$2000, petition of William Jones, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 16) A request to gravel and tar
- 17) A request to gravel and tar Peck Street, \$3000, petition of Leon Thahan, not approved by the Finance Committee.

- 18) A request to gravel and tar Cedar Street, starting at Purchase Street toward the west, \$3000, petition of Wesley McLeod, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 19) A request to gravel and tar Cedar Street towards the Dighton line, \$3000, petition of Sara Vandenberg, not approved by the Finance Committee.
- 20) A request to gravel and tar Carpenter Street, starting at Perryville Road towards Danforth Street, \$3000, petition of, not approved by the Finance Committee

Of the 20 petitions for road improvements that year, only five were approved:

- 1) To raise and appropriate \$2000 to widen the third curve on Winter Street starting at School Street
- 2) To raise and appropriate \$2000 to gravel and tar Summer Street beginning at the Aldrich farm gate.
- 3) To raise and appropriate \$3000 to gravel and tar Chestnut Street from Boutin's corner toward Byron Gifford
- 4) To raise and appropriate \$3000 to gravel the south end of Pleasant Street towards the
- 5) To raise and appropriate \$2000 to gravel and tar Cedar Street beginning at Plain Street to the Swansea line.*

The Final Push, 1950 to 1980

Leon Trahan, a political activist living on Peck Street, who had been trying for years to have the town pave Peck Street, a rough gravel road, and getting nowhere, in 1950 persuaded the town to try a different approach. Instead of the town meeting acting upon so many special road improvement petitions each year, give the Selectmen the sole authority to allocate a yearly appropriation of \$25,000 and the remainder of the Chapter 81 road maintenance funds on improving roads. As to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, although it did end the squabbles over roads in the town meeting, it gave the selectmen even more political power over road construction. The people with the most politically favor or those who squawked the loudest, were more apt to have their road paved next, but over all it was a better and more efficient way to handle the problem.

The Selectmen Meetings on Roads, Circa 1950-1965

In the fall, the three selectmen, Lester Gray, Chairman and a construction foreman, Oscar Berghman, a house painter and Chief of Police, and Ernest Goff, a dairy

□ About this time, 1949, fresh out of college and beginning my first engineering job, building an addition and installing another generator at the Montaup Electric Company in Somerset, I moved into our old family homestead on Fairview Avenue and began commuting to the Montaup over the major highways, Winthrop Street and Somerset Avenue. After a few days of that, I looked on a road map to see if there was a shorter route over the back roads. I found that a more direct route was over Reservoir Avenue, Simmons Street, and Hornbine Road in Rehoboth; and Baker and Sharp Lots Road in Swansea. I knew from an early age that Fairview Avenue, Peck Street and Francis Street were rough gravel roads, but I was surprised to see that the whole of Simmons Street from Reservoir Avenue to the Swansea line was a one, too, so I went back to commuting over the main highways. I soon learned that there were many more miles of unpaved roads in town, and I never would have guessed that within ten years, I would be surveying and laying out many of them, laying out the roads for straightening and paving.

farmer, would confer with Victor Fredette, highway superintendent, and Fred Tripp and Seth Von Freeman, both Mass-highway state aid engineers from Taunton, about which roads to reconstruct. During the summer and early fall, the highway department did mostly general road maintenance work and shaping-up, tarring, and putting the finishing touches to the shoulders of the roads they had rebuilt the previous year. As that work was ending in the late fall, the discussions began at the selectmen meetings over which road should be improved next, according to the amount money left in the road appropriation and Chapter 81 state aid account.

Back in the 1950s and early 60s, before the state open meeting laws were enacted, selectmen meetings were held quite differently from now. They were held in almost secrecy in the small room on the left off the entrance hall in the American Legion building on Bay State Road with no one present, except Marian Nichols Bliss the town clerk, who sat through the whole meeting taking notes and William Francis, the town treasurer, who would usually walk in unannounced about 8:30 pm to pick up the pay warrants. Anyone else who had business with the selectmen had to sit out in the hall until they were called in. When new road work was planned that required "land-takings" and surveying, I was asked to attend to discuss the work, usually as the last item on their agenda. By then, with the formal part of the meeting over, the selectmen became very relaxed and the atmosphere very pleasant, except for being able to cut the cigarette smoke with a knife. The selectmen along with Nichols, Francis, and some of their friends who may have intentionally come in late to hang around to informally not to discuss roads, but the latest town gossip, political and otherwise.

If the selectmen were contemplating straightening a road that required surveying, Gray would ask me if I could prepare a road layout in time for a special town meeting to act upon in the fall, but if no surveying was involved, Fredette was given the job of laying out the road "by eye," keeping the new layout within the confines of town owned land. It was something he was very adept at doing, as attested to by his laying out the series of reverse curves on Fairview Avenue east of Anawan Street between the Provonchee house, which was right on the edge of the road on one side and a high ledge on the other side, and further along, between a stone wall on the Provonchee property and

"mad dog rock" on the other side, and then lining up the road to pass over a new bridge that Fredette had previously built in 1957 over the East Branch of the Palmer River.

During the 1950s and 60s there were many "land takings, as it was the policy of the selectmen and state engineers to eliminate sharp bends and awkward curves in the roads, such as in 1956 when Bliss Street was rebuilt through the "stony swamp," and Reynolds Avenue was relocated under the power lines at Glebe Street, but later in the 1970s and 80s, although the town residents still wanted their roads paved, they wanted to keep them within the confines of town-owned land with no "land-takings." The last two layouts I made for the town, the reconfiguration of the intersection of Bay State Road and Moulton Street at the American Legion Hall and the easing of the reverse curves on Fairview Avenue at the Red Fox Club, failed to pass the town meeting. It was in the same era as when the town helped defeat the proposal to build Interstate 895 through the easterly part of Rehoboth.

When there were "land takings," the selectmen were often lackadaisical about compensating their owners for their loss of land. They thought it was compensation enough that the town was paving their road. Many people accepted that and even went further to help, as Hymie Fine did in 1930 by donating the gravel from his gravel bank to improve Smith Street. When Bliss Street was relocated through the stony swamp in 1956, the heirs of Bradford Goff, one of whom was selectman Ernest Goff, donated the land to the town. When Fredette was trying to fit in the new road around the reverse curves on Fairview Avenue by the Provonchee land in 1963, he found that there wasn't enough room to fit the road in between "mad dog rock" and Provonchee's boundary wall on the other side. Provonchee gladly let the town have all the land needed by allowing the highway department to move the wall back on to his property with no compensation for the loss of his land. He thought it was compensation enough just to have the road paved to get rid of the dust that enveloped his house raised by passing cars. On the other hand in 1957 while I was laying out a new location of Pleasant Street near the Rocky Run through the front yard of a house, the owner unexpectedly showed up. He was not happy to see me surveying through his front yard with a bulldozer tearing it up right behind me without having received any payment from the town for his loss of land.

By the 1980s almost all of Rehoboth's 120 miles of roads had been widened, rebuilt and paved to at least a twenty-foot width and "macadamized" with an oil and gravel surface and later with more durable asphalt pavement, thus completing a monumental task begun eighty years earlier with the "macadamizing" of the first section of Winthrop Street. The Reverend George Tilton's words about the completion of the Winthrop Street project in 1917 are as applicable today as when he wrote them: "Endowed with a fine macadam road and with other roads leading to the village in prime condition, the prosperity of a thrifty people are assured."

If Tilton, however, thought Rehoboth's remaining 115 miles of dirt and gravel roads were in prime condition in 1917, I am sure he would be amazed to see how much the town has accomplished over the following 80 years in turning what he thought were suitable roads for his time to our present network of wide, paved, and well-maintained scenic roads, now in really prime condition.

Appendix 1

The WPA's Report on Rehoboth's Unpaved Rehoboth Roads in 1939 with some of my annotations

North of Winthrop Street

Tremont Street, west end, Agricultural to Seekonk line	1.75 miles
Agricultural Avenue, Rocky Hill Road to Tremont Street	0.7 miles
Smith Street, Tremont to town line	0.75 acres
Fairview Avenue, .6 miles paved at Tremont Street end	
Red Fox Club to Anawan Street	2.0 acres
Fairview Avenue, Anawan Street to foot of Crum Wheeler Hill	1.5 miles
New Street paved from Fairview to Maple swamp Road, 1 mile	
except from George Sherman house to Fairview,	0.1 miles
Francis Street (one house)	1.0 mile
Reynolds Avenue, Tremont to Dighton line	1.6 miles
Peck Street	1.5 miles
Dean Street	0.5 mile
Fairfield Street,(dirt road), Ash St to Ortelt	0.6 mile
Ash Street, (dirt road)	1.2 miles
Homestead Avenue , Fairview to Pine Street	2.75 miles
Perryville Road, paved to Goff farm, gravel to Homestead	0.6 miles
Holmes Street	0.5 miles
Rocky Hill Road, Selectmen authorized to abandoned 1.5 miles	
of it from Homestead Avenue to top of Hill at Allen in 1926	1.5 miles±
Bliss Street	1.25 miles
Broad Street	1.1 miles
Carpenter Street	1.0 mile
Danforth Street	1.7 miles
Hillside Avenue, (partly dirt at golf course)	1.5 miles
Pine Street,town line to 1/2 mile north of Broad Street	1.7 miles

River Street	0.6 miles	
Salisbury Street (dirt road)		1.0 miles
Walnut Street (dirt road)	0.2 miles	
Williams Street	0.5 miles	29 miles±

South of Winthrop Street

Almeida Road	0.25 miles	
Barney Avenue (Providence to Allmeida Road)	1.25 miles	
Brook Street	0.25 miles	
Cedar Street	1.5 miles	
Chestnut Street	1.7 miles	
Davis Street	0.6 miles	
French Street	0.5 miles	
Gorham Street	1.0 mile	
Hornbine Road	0.75 mile	
Kelton Street	0.25 mile	
Maple Lane	0.5 mile	
Mason Street (paved- Ivory Kimball-?)		
Martin Street (paved Pleasant Street to Rocky Run)	1.25 acres	
New Street, Maple Swamp Road to County Street	1.0 mile	
Peckhan Street	0.5 mile	
Pleasant Street (paved except at Rocky Run)	0.25 mile	
Plain Street (at Spring Street)	0.5 mile	
Pond Street	1.0 mile	
Purchase Street (paved 1/8th mile north of Hornbine-?)	1.5 miles	
Reed Street (paved)		
Reservoir Avenue	2.0 miles	
School Street	0.75 miles	
Simmons Street	1.5 miles	
Spring Street	1.0 mile	
Summer Street (only 1/2 mile paved)	2.5 miles	
Water Street	1.0 mile	
Wheaton Avenue (dirt road)	0.5 mile	
Wheeler Street	1.5 mile	
Wilmarth Bridge Road	0.3 mile	
Winter Street	1.0 mile	
Wood Street (dirt road- only Archie Colbath's house)		1.0 mile
miles±		28

A total of 57 miles ± of unpaved roads

by Otis Dyer, Rehoboth

Sources, Rehoboth Town Reports

Interviews with Rehoboth people over the years

The author's recollections

The History of Rehoboth, by the Reverend George H. Tilton in 1917

The WPA's 1939 report on Rehoboth roads

Paul Connors, Sun Chronicle photographer

Jeanne Gilbert, Sun Chronicle photographer