Transportation

Howard Carpenter rolling the roads.

Before the arrival of automobiles, horses and walking were the only means of transportation within Cabot. Train depots in Marshfield, West Danville, and Walden made further points accessible. Each neighborhood cared for its own roads (usually corresponding with that school district) and residents either paid a highway tax or worked off their share. Around 1890 the state legislature passed a law making each town government responsible for operating all district schools within that town's boundaries. At the same time, the towns also became responsible for all the roads.

"This latter move regarding highways caused a lot of dissatisfaction by having only one road gang in Cabot which, naturally, would give their first attention to the roads in and about the villages. Those in the more rural districts got little, or no attention, until late in the season. Under the old system each district would get together early in the season, cleaning out the ditches and piling high the water bars on the hills and with farm plows doing a very satisfactory bit of work." (Blodgett)

Individuals worked on the roads, winter and summer, and were paid by the town. In the winter sleighs and sleds replaced the wheeled-vehicles, and roads were rolled instead of plowed. A Cabot 1897 town report shows 12 individuals were hired for rolling roads and in the summer of that year. L. J. Walbridge was paid $7.50 a day for "running road machine, two men and five horses, boarding self and team."

George Carpenter rolling the Carpenter dooryard.

"In the winter, of course, they used rollers back when I was young. They had these great high rollers, you know, and there would be 'bout six horses would drag these rollers and they'd go around and roll your yard and then when it comes spring the snow would all have been packed down, and then when you went to go out you'd sink right in to your knees and the horses were just the same." — Zoe Smith Irish

"We used to have winters that were some different. There would be four or five days you wouldn't be able to get out because of the roads. Of course, we rolled them in those days and they weren't built up the way they are now. They've got them where they can take care of them now. I've seen snow banks that would be six to eight feet high and all hard and you could almost drive a team right on top of them."
— Aaron Bolton

"My father [Angus Smith] did a great deal of snow rolling. He always had at least four big draft horses. He used his own four horses on the team and he usually had the Plains area to roll. Usually Harry Gamblin or Les Barnett went with him. It was a long cold trip. Often times they'd have to get out and shovel ahead of the horses and take off the first team and drive them back and forth before they could get through. This was before the day of snow fences. . . One thing that we children always's doing after the roads were rolled was sliding. It was absolutely perfect." — Jennie Donaldson

"I kept the road up to Walker's rolled and down to Lower Cabot for the mail man. . . Angus Smith and Edwin Smith had a roller and they rolled out over Whittier Hill clear up to the Wheeler place. That was the old Lynn Folsom farm, and then they rolled out the other way up towards Lester Barnett and Harry Gamblin, they run a roller. Jack Foster lived up in the middle of the Plains there, he went out to Boltons and over a lot of those roads. . . Everybody had their own routes to do, we were paid by the town." — Francis Foster

"On very stormy weather morns my uncle [Charlie Harvey] and neighbor would each drive a pair of horses and get the big old snow roller out. Sometimes they put me on the high platform to ride to school. The rollers squeaked and

squealed as it turned over the heavy snow."

— Louise Staples

Donovan Houston helped roll roads using a six horse team. Donovan said he was paid $4.50 for his rolling route which would "spoil the day." *"We were rolling over on Houston Hill [in Walden] and then we went up the side road to Berniers and then come over across by Beans. . . Well, we stopped for dinner at Berniers and they gave us some beet wine to drink. So we drank some and went out after dinner to roll roads. We went out through the lane and rolled a whole fence down. I guess we had too much beet wine. . . We carried some grain and hay right on the roller to feed the horses whenever we stopped."*

"[Hermie Folsom] was rolling the roads and stopped and wanted to get warmed up one day and father said something to him and Hermie says, 'Well,' he says, 'Sucking the town teats is pretty good some days, but by God it gets awful gargety when it gets this cold.' I guess it was down around twenty below zero." — Roger Walker

Hubert Wheeler rolling in front of his home on Southwest Hill.

J. M. Southwick was road commissioner in 1911. The town report for that year lists "tools owned by the town: one road machine, three snow rollers, one plow, one cable chain, 2 iron bars, 4 drills, 2 sledge hammers, 1 striking hammer, 6 shovels, 1 pick, 2 lengths corrugated sluice, 4 hoes, 1 bush scythe and [various] brick tiles." Among commissioner C. W. Houghton's expenses for 1916 was $53.45 for "grain for road machine team."

"The road machine was a old big heavy hunk of iron, run by hand, big wheels on it. One man stood on it and changed the scraper angle, the other fellow drove. . . A lot of farmers had an old drag hone in the spring time that they used to drag over the roads to fill the ruts up and get the water off. The town paid them to do it. [Later] they had an old tractor that they dragged the road machine with, went around once a year with that on the back roads." — Robert "Gus" Perry

Charley McCarty remembered building roads in swampy areas during the depression: *"I think I was 17 and the road commissioner had so much money allotted so to spread it 'round to every farmer or their son or some member of the family to work for two weeks. And then somebody else worked for two weeks. If I remember right the wages were 37 ½ cents an hour. It was just shovel and stuff. If we wanted to build a road with a stone base, there was a man that had a team of horses and he'd drive back to some old stone wall somewhere and we threw the rocks in by hand. Then they had a gang down below at the road, and often it was somebody who was a little more experienced, set the stones up kind of on end to make a stone base across the swamp. To gravel the roads you went to the gravel pit and threw the gravel in with shovels. They didn't have bucket loaders or anything."*

— Charley McCarty

The road machine on Southwest Hill road.

"I remember when my husband [Anson Bickford] worked on WPA, which was Roosevelt's project for giving men work, on Gould's Flat and they laid flat stones for a base before they put in the gravel or dirt on top. I don't think it was paved at the time." — Geraldine Bickford

"The road could be impossible. I've seen my father get stuck with a load, you know a few bags of feed or something, and he used to get in under [the wagon] and put his back up, lift it up so that I could put stones under the wheel so we could get so the horses could pull it out of the mud."

— Russ Therrian

HORSE TRANSPORTATION

"Everyone had their buggies of various types. When my grandfather [George Gould] moved to the village the family was growing larger and we needed a better means of transportation. . . My father sent to Elkhill, Illinois, for the surrey in knock down. One day when the telephone rang they were calling from Marshfield depot to tell us that there had been some freight arrived for Angus Smith. . . My father hitched the horses to the lumber wagon and they went into Marshfield depot and brought it home in various parts of knock down and spent the day putting it together. All the nuts and bolts which he was very careful of as he took them out of the packages; none were lost. When it was finished we had the surrey with the fringe around the top, which looked quite elegant. It looked like patent leather for the dashboard and the fenders which were the mudguards on the wheels. It was upholstered with cushions of some sort of felt material. So when it came Sunday we all rode to church in the surrey with the fringe around the top." — Jennie Donaldson

Elsie Walbridge in a buggy.

Angus Smith family in their new surrey, 1919.
Below: Gene Dow & Tom Osgood with Dow's lumber wagon.

"Dad had a lumber wagon . . . and he had the runner sleds. The body of the lumber wagon went on the sleds . . . Then he had a pung and he had the carriage with the top that folded down and he had an express wagon. The express wagon had runners too. . . You could convert it."

— Bessie Bean

"About 1886 the Cabot Carriage and Sleigh Company was built on the meadow down over the bank and across the brook from the present creamery. . . The Cabot Carriage Co., manufactured a strong buggy wagon and single seated sleighs with a wonderful curve in the dash board." (Blodgett).

The Wales shop, at the corner of Elm and Main Streets, also made sleighs and in 1918 the entire building slid into the river (see chapter on Bad Weather).

Raymond Peck was Cabot's mail carrier for 51 years starting in 1918. The mail was delivered six days a week. Herbert Schute brought the mail from Marshfield station to Cabot with a team. *"Raymond had a buggy. . . they had leather mail pouches and the mail was carried in that and the packages under the seat. Then in the wintertime he used a Wales sleigh which was very light, it was made here in Cabot. If the horses got down or anything he could get out, unhitch the horse and pull the sleigh along himself. . . He kept three horses, so if one went bad, and he had to supply everything himself. . . Of course his horses were trained and he could put the reins right over their necks and go along and the horse would stop just where he was supposed to at the mail box. One family in particular, on Cabot Plains, the Urban family, on a terrible cold windy day in the wintertime Mr. Urban would have the barn doors open and Raymond would come along. He'd drive his team right into the barn and go into the house and have hot coffee and perhaps a piece of pie."*

— Ruth Peck

Raymond Peck, mail carrier, in 1920.

When residents came to town for shopping or church or meetings, horses were tied to hitching rails and the two churches each had a horse shed. *"Both of them had about eight to twelve stalls where they could drive right in with their sleigh or whatever. They were open on just one side."*

— Donovan Houston

"I remember times when there wasn't enough room on the hitch rails to tie all the horses. They had to tie them to the maple trees around the village. The first hitch rail was Clem Voodry's and they had hitch rails clear up through to Hopkins there and then Rogers had them all the way up, but I've seen times when everybody came to town and there wa'n't enough places to tie all the horses. . . Town Meeting day every church horse shed would be packed full of horses . . . and there was never enough room for all the horses." — Francis Foster

Of course the horses needed water. *"Nobody stops to think about it nowadays, but you take a team pulling a load from Marshfield up here [Hookerville] in the summertime, they want to drink three or four times. There was a water tub in Marshfield just before you come out of the village, and when you get to Peterville there was another one this side of Hermie Folsom's. The next would be over to the Garney place. I don't think there was another one until they got to Frank O'Connor's. It was kind of a cooperative deal I guess. If they needed fixing I guess somebody just went and fixed it. Filling stations for horses, it was something you had to have."*

— Everett Ennis

Blacksmiths in the upper village included Lafe Meyers and his son Walter. *"[Walter] had a blacksmith shop between LaMonda's and the block, the apartment house here. My father [Harry Walbridge] was shoveling off the roof on the block one winter and Walter had the forge going and my father took a shovel full of snow and dropped it down the chimney and he then got outside real quick. . . I'm sure Walter would have split something if he'd caught him, Walter was a big heavy man."*

— Bessie Bean

"Then later Leo Burbank came, then Royce Talbert and Leo and Royce ran the blacksmith shop there for a good many years. Then Royce moved to the place opposite the creamery."

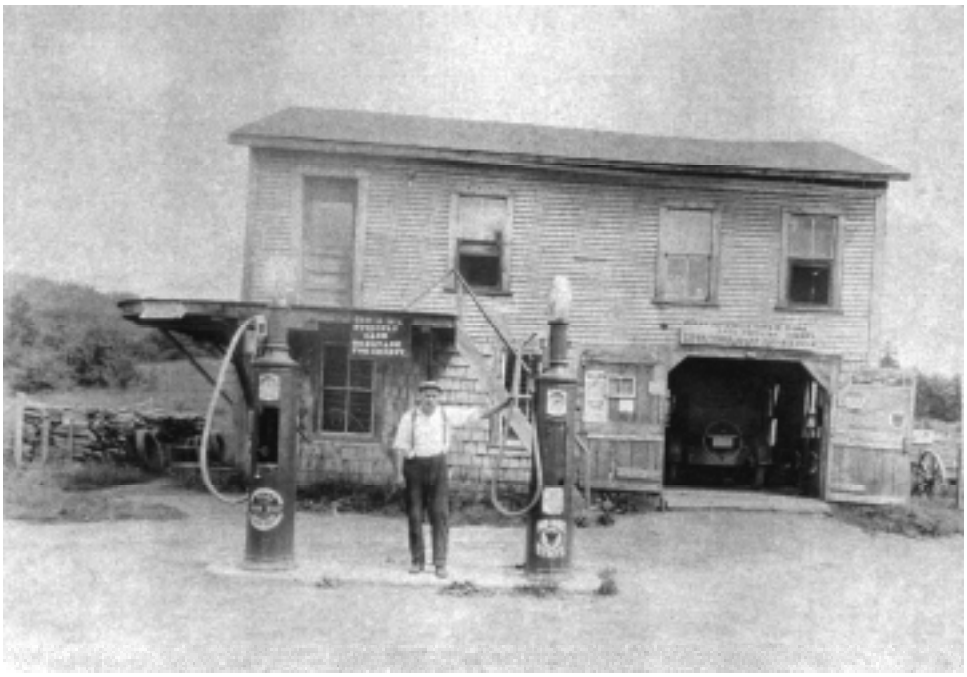
— Jennie Donaldson

In Lower Cabot Frank Davison set up shop. His son, Wilfred went to school in Lower Cabot and he then attended Middlebury College. He was a Cabot school principal in 1908 and eventually a dean of the Breadloaf School in Middlebury. Fred Ladue bought the blacksmith shop from Davison and continued its operation until the mid-20's.

"That man was busy all the time. He made different things for farmers besides shoeing the horses."

— Blanche Lamore

Perley Lapoint was an admired blacksmith in the Hookerville area. *"He could take two pieces of iron and stick them together when no one else could. . . He could make a whole wagon wheel, the spokes, and the felly and the whole thing. He was a wheelwright and a good one. He would sharpen the drills for some quarry men at Trow and Holden in Barre and they claimed they couldn't get them sharper anywhere else. He used to take railroad spikes, he'd go up to West Danville and walk the railroad and find spikes and chisel off pieces and make horse shoe nails so he wouldn't have to buy those. That's getting down pretty fine. . . His forge had a hand crank and his wife cranked it. She'd stand there and crank that forge, I used to pity that woman. On a hot day the sweat would be pouring right off from her. He'd holler and*



Perley Lapoint's garage on Route 2 in South Cabot.

swear at her because she was cranking it too fast or she was cranking it too slow. She couldn't do a thing one minute to satisfy. If I'd a been her I'd said you crank your own forge and I'd went upstairs and stayed there." — Russ Therrian

Flora Barrett gets a tow.

HORSELESS CARRIAGES

In her diary, Etta Walbridge noted the first cars seen passing through Cabot Village in 1913 on their way to Fred Walbridge's auction.

"I remember the first two cars. There was a Mr. Albright Nelson who lived where Gus Perry lives now, and he bought a car. It was like a touring car with an old top and he drove for people. They could hire him to transport them. At that time you had to have a chauffeur's license to take pay for doing it. Another car was Clem Voodry's who ran the little grocery store. That was also a touring car with no top. The seats were leather and the back seat came so high it would be above an adult's head. Gertrude Wells had a car and that must have been in the late teens. In later years Ernest Peck had a car. It had a soft top, one of those that could be folded back. He had a chauffeur's license and he wore his pin on the front of his cap and he transported people for pay." — May Wheeler

Arecca Urban's first car ride was with Charlie Houghton of Marshfield. *"His car had running boards and a lot of brass on it. We got in and the dog got in the way. We went right down over the shoulder of the road down into the field. That was my first ride in a car."* — Arecca Urban

"My father and mother never owned a car. Anything they wanted to do, you hitched up a horse and buggy and traveled that way. My father wanted to get a hair cut, he'd get on the milk truck and go to Plainfield and get his hair cut and ride the milk truck back." — Carlton Domey

"My father had a Stanley Steamer. You built a fire in it and when the steam got up it would go. And you head up out of Lower Cabot and you would stop and the fire would hang right out of it and get the steam right up. It would almost go up and then it wouldn't go. You'd come back down. So then he'd steam it up again and turn it around and back it up. That last steep hill he had to back up. Then he'd get to the top and we'd turn around and go home. . . It had a boiler in it and you used wood . . . You'd just get outside the road and get some wood and have a little fire going in the car that creates steam. Where your gasoline engine would be today there was a boiler and you fired it right in the bottom like a train did." — Herndon Foster

"My Dad bought a new Model T Ford in 1923. . . My first car was a second hand model that cost $50. It was a 1925 Model T. My first new car was a Model A Phaeton in 1929. It was an open car with two seats. . . . The fastest I could get it was 40 miles an hour and that was between Derby and Derby line, which was the only piece of hard top road in the state." — Donovan Houston

"When I was driving I was only allowed to drive seven miles an hour going down through the woods to Cabot because Roy Hopkins who only had one arm was a wild driver and my grandfather [George Harvey] was always afraid we'd meet him." — Francelia Goddard

Charlie Houghton with his cousin Florence in South Cabot, circa 1911.

"I tried driving a car once. My husband had a Model T Ford. And I drove out and went right over the ditch. I said: 'You take that car, I ain't going to drive'." — Lettie Perkins

"Once at the foot of the hill above us going to the quarry, my father looked at the speedometer and said 'Louise, do you know you're driving 20 miles an hour?' Because that seemed more than a horse would go." — Louise Staples

"The first auto that I really can remember much about was the one that Gertie Wells had. It was a big car and I remember it had little vases in between the windows in back for flowers. . . And the one that Mr. Perry had, Walter Perry, I can remember that because it was an old, old car. His wife was crippled and he kept that because he could take her for a

John and Earl Barnett with a load of logs on a double sled on Main St.

ride in that once in a while. The one I really had anything personally to do with, there was a school teacher that came to the house for dinners and he had a car and I don't know how old I was, but of course I liked to ride in it. So when I got through dinner I'd run out and set down on the running board and when he came out he'd take me for a ride up to the other end of the village. Up to the bridge and back and let me out at the driveway. And my mother told me that I must not ask for a ride. I said, 'I don't. I just sit on the running board.' And it worked. I know Ernest Peck had a Gardener car and he used to take people. But of course my folks never had a car."

— Bessie Bean

"I can just about remember my first automobile ride, going in an open touring car from Lower Cabot to Barre, earlier than 1925 I think. I took it all in. There was an awful lot of traffic and commotion on the streets in Barre, horses and cars, more than I was used to." — Geraldine Bickford

"When I got old enough old Win Houston, lived up where Richard Scheiber lives, he had an old Model A Ford pickup. He and his wife went to the movies every Saturday night and he always come down to the hardware store and he'd take anybody who wanted a ride for 50 cents. And he's say 'At 11:30 the truck's going home. You either be in the truck or you walk.' They had a big hall over there and they had dances and there was a bunch of us boys could always ride over with Win and keep watching our watch, we didn't want to walk home."

— Carlton Domey

Even those with automobiles still relied on their horses during the winter.

"After people started using cars and trucks you sort of expected to get stuck. . . We never saw a car go by in the winter, of course, because the roads were just rolled. . . The farmers all came with their teams, bringing the milk, double teams usually."

— May Wheeler

"Somebody had skis on the front of their car. I can remember it going through town." — Erma Hodgeman

"It was a veterinarian. They made the Model T narrow so they would go in the tracks made by the sled runner." — George Paine

"In the spring it was a terrible time getting between Cabot and Marshfield. It would be very deep muddy ruts." — Elliot Houghton

"Oh the mud was absolutely horrible on the roads. Our road was between the Bothfeld Farm and Churchills' so we had one of the least traveled roads. On our road there was only Paquins and us. Harvey Paquin and the George Hill place and then you came out at Churchills' so it was the least cared for road so we had plenty of mud in the spring."

— Ann Orton

The 1925 town records show 170 men paid for summer road work, ranging from $1.50 for E.J. Gamble for 1/2 day labor to $106.50 for Granville A. Laird for use of team.

Aaron Bolton plowing on Cabot Plains, 1936.

"Raymond Farrington built a snow plow to go on the front of his big old International truck. It was made out of heavy maple plank. He kept the road open from Cabot Village to Marshfield Village in the late 20's. . . They did have a big

heavy set of sleds and they took the wheels off the road grader and put [the grader] on the sled when that was a warm day. The road would get high in the middle the way the horses tread it, they'd run through with a harrow, chop it up with disc harrows and they'd come down with the grader on that set of sleds and angle the blade so it would push the snow right off out of the road." — Francis Foster

"I would say it was in the early 30's when they first started to plow the roads. Prior to that they rolled . . . You put your cars up on blocks around early December maybe November, and didn't get them out until May of next year. . . What a time they had when they first started plowing the roads. You know they had inferior equipment and they was always breaking down." — Charley McCarty

Abbott family touring car.

Many men were paid for rolling roads as indicated by the following paragraph inserted in the end of the 1931 town report: "The following individuals have contributed toward plowing winter roads: A. W. Bolton, W. G. Houston, P. R. Pike, F. M. Walbridge, A. J. Smith, Flint Lumber Company, R. A. White, H. E. Houston, E. R. Lawson, C. H. Pike, W. I. Goodrich, Trojan Engineering Company."

"Cabot was somewhat slow in adopting the new system and when a clause was placed in the Town Meeting Warning to see if the town would adopt the new method and purchase a snow plow in the 30's, nearly all voters in town were out and the battle raged furiously but the modern method won by a small majority and a vote to purchase a snow plow prevailed." (Blodgett)

The 1934 inventory in that year's town report included "6 rolls" and a "new tractor and plow, $2,820.00."

"When Cabot finally got its first snow plow it was slow and clumsy and only used to plow a few main roads. . . Some of the farmers were beginning to have their grain delivered by truck . . . so they would pay the town to have their road plowed, out of their own pocket." — Jennie Donaldson

"Ned Barnett was road commissioner and he had a fellow all ready to plow and he got killed by a horse, [Jack Foster]. The horse kicked him in the chest just before the winter set in so they were left with no one to drive the plow. They bought a brand new plow and a new tractor. It was the first winter they kept the road open from St. Johnsbury to Montpelier. I plowed part of the road on the state road [Route 2]. Each town had their part. Danville, I met him down here at West Danville, old Ernie Davinger, and then I plowed back the other way as far as Marshfield, and then Marshfield went down as far as Plainfield. I don't know about the rest of it. That's the way we kept the roads through to Montpelier. No state highway crew at all and very soon after that they begun to do it. The state took it all over and had their own equipment. But it was a pretty slow job with a machine that run three miles an hour plowing those state roads. I tell you it was awful slow. I remember resurfacing the roads. That was gravel, it wasn't blacktop then." — Aaron Bolton

It was a long time before cars could venture out in winter conditions: *"[The roads were] ice and if they wore down more in the middle sometimes two cars would slide together on that ice there. They tried harrowing with the horses and the harrow and then scrape it off with the scraper. They done it right in Cabot street. Lester Barnett used to bring a team into Cabot Village and take them into a blacksmith shop and get sharp shoes on them so they could go up and down the street with that ice on it."* — Francis Foster

In 1932 the road from Marshfield to South Cabot was given a "hard macadam surface." In 1939, $3,000 was spent "for the hard surface road from lower Cabot to the Marshfield line." (1939 town report) The rest of the road to Cabot was paved in 1940. Many roads were "thrown up" or basically abandoned in the 1920's and 1930's. Shortcuts were no longer as necessary, because of the speed of automobiles. As people moved away the expense of maintaining a road outweighed the convenience of keeping it open. The method of breaking by rolling was continued despite the increase of automobiles and the gradual use of snow plows.

Snowplow at the Bolton farm on Cabot Plains, 1936.

The office of Road Commissioner was elective when Robert "Gus" Perry came in and then the state changed the law to make it an appointed position. Gus held the job from 1956 to 1986. His son Allan then held the position for nine years before becoming a dairy farmer.

"I rolled from 1942 to 1947 when the town got another tractor with the bulldozer with the big V-plow on the front. The Perry family had three generations of road

commissioners. "My Dad [Leon Perry] had it for about 15 years. He went out in 1949, then Ned Barnett, he took it over for a while, then Cecil Morse, and then Warren Alexander. I got it from him. I had it 30 years.

"I can remember my father, he had people that rolled for him like Harv Dunbar, Harold Lanphear, and Edwin Smith used to roll over Thistle Hill. . .When I started out we had an old four wheel drive army truck and an old grader, a Ford dump truck and that old, old bulldozer.

"It would take about two weeks in the fall putting [snowfence] up and you could tear it down faster but you had to roll it up . . . It was in terrible shape. All broke and lots of times you'd plow through that snow drift by the snow fence to make it catch more snow and sometimes you couldn't get out and you'd just plow right through the fence to get out where there wasn't so much snow. We stored it up in that schoolhouse by Ackermanns' and up to West Hill Pond.

"Herman Bergeron furnished a truck and he used to go over to Marshfield, Walden and plow Hookerville and some of them little places, 'cause back then they didn't keep the black top clean anyway so you could drive right down there with a crawler tractor and it didn't bother it any, 'cause it built up with snow and ice. . . We used to plow right into Marshfield Village."

— Gus Perry

"Around 1927 they started plowing the roads and this was quite an undertaking. . .They plowed part way, about a mile out of the village going to South Walden. I remember my dad [George Walbridge] being very disgusted about the whole affair because they'd be logging and taking the logs to the mill. We'd have good sledding — a lot of it — and then you'd get down to where they'd plowed it and it was all mud."

— Howard Walbridge

One of the first known car accidents was in July 22, 1921. Civil War veteran Kelsey Freeman was walking and was hit by a car. *"He was at the foot of the hill by the bridge [Bond Hill] when a car was trying to make the hill in high gear. It was trying to go fast enough to make that hill out of the village in high gear. . . [Kelsey] was deaf and apparently he thought the car was going on the South Walden road and he stepped in front of it. He had my sister's cart. He was going up to the garden on the South Walden road."*

— Bessie Bean

Barre Times 1939

A horse owned by Harry Tibbetts of Cabot, was killed Saturday night when struck near Molly's Falls on the Marshfield-Danville road by an automobile driven by Reginald Barden of Montpelier. Tibbetts was driving a team from the direction of Marshfield and was making a turn onto a side road leading to his farm when the automobile going from the direction of Danville struck it. Tibbetts and another man in the team with him were thrown out but were not injured. The wagon was smashed and about $75 damage done to the front of the automobile. Inspectors of the motor vehicle department who investigated the accident said that Tibbetts did not display a light on his team. In Montpelier municipal court today Tibbetts admitted his team was unlighted and was fined $5.

"E. A. Merritt had the garage in Cabot. He sold Model T Fords. . . All these Fords come into Marshfield depot. The fenders weren't on and tops weren't on and everything was folded up inside. They were most all touring cars you know. Those days they wasn't a closed car." — Dwight Clark

Merritt's Garage was originally located in the bottom of the Farrington Block in the center of the village. It then relocated to where the turn is made into the town garage. That building was taken down in 1997.

Gradually the sleighs and buggies and pungs were retired. One reminder of this older mode of transportation is on display in Cabot's Historical Society, a graceful sleigh built in the Wale's Shop. On the back of the sleigh is a stag's head painted by Joe Legendre.

Ralph Perry Garage on Main Street where the fire station now stands.

Above: Sifting out the stones at the gravel-pit, circa 1930. The house in the background is the present home of Charlie Pilbin.

Right: Building the Perkins bridge in Lower Cabot.

Below: Putting in a stone base on Main St.