

TRACKING DOWN the ROUTE 1 COW TUNNEL by Sandra Nichols Ward

"Do you remember the cow tunnel?" asked a Danvers classmate at our 55th high school reunion. He eagerly shared his memory of running with friends through that tunnel long ago. I had no clue what he was talking about. A cow tunnel? Where? He said it was under Route 1, connecting from a farm on one side to a pasture on the other. I was curious to learn more, but competing conversations in that crowded cocktail party drew attention elsewhere.

Recently the topic arose again, and I had an opportunity to hear more. I had returned to Danvers - not for a reunion, but for a conference at the Double Tree Inn on Ferncroft Road. Coincidentally, Rob Jackson was also visiting Danvers and our paths crossed one evening. He greeted me with a smile, and soon repeated his question, "Do you remember the cow tunnel?" I laughed and shook my head. This time Rob pointed on a Danvers map to the location of the tunnel, which he thought was constructed when Route 1 was widened and the grade changed sometime after WWII. I certainly know the timing of that Route 1 construction project, which I'd witnessed from the Hathorne School during first grade (1949-50). That's when the old traffic light at the Route 62 intersection was replaced by a bridge and four "cloverleaf" roadways, one of which looped around our school, shrinking our schoolyard. Route 1 became a safer, smoother road as hilltops were cut down and bridges crossed valleys. I can imagine that this huge construction project disrupted not only our one-room school, but also farms and cow paths along the way.

In the '50's, Rob Jackson and other boys from the Highlands played in the tunnel, which connected from the Endicott farm to a low-lying corner of the Danvers State Hospital property. Rob remembers swampy land nearby and water sometimes in that tunnel. Perhaps there were drainage problems in the area, with overflow from Beaver Brook. I asked about cows. Rob said he doesn't remember cows in the tunnel. Instead he told a story about his Dalmatian dog Crisco. He and Crisco had gone through the tunnel and up onto the Danvers State Hospital hill, where a film crew and actors were filming opening scenes for the movie "Home Before Dark" (1958). Rob watched with interest. Suddenly a voice yelled through a loud speaker, "Would someone get that dog out of here?" Rob and dog ran to the cow tunnel, thus quickly escaping home to the Highlands.

Rob reports that the tunnel was later filled in and blocked, perhaps when Route 95 was built nearby. Only a small portion of the east end of the tunnel structure can be seen today, and getting to it involves detective work and bushwhacking through dense vegetation. Rob has sent me some photos he took in

2009, and a sketch he drew from memory, but neither of us have seen any photographs of the actual tunnel. Perhaps readers may help us learn more.

Rob recently requested information from the town of Danvers. He reports that Rick Rodgers, town engineer, and Miriam Contols, technical administrative assistant, and others of the engineering staff for the Engineering & Electrical Division, town of Danvers, were most helpful. He was able to examine "A Plan & Profile of State Highway in the Town of Danvers" (1948) and see blueprints depicting the overall changes made, or to be made, to Route 1. Those plans show a "Cattle Pass" under Route 1 south of the junction of Ingersoll Street, exactly where Rob remembers the tunnel.

Meanwhile, I called the Danvers Archives and asked Richard Trask if he knew of any cow tunnels in Danvers. He recalled reading in the papers of William C. Endicott Jr. (1860-1936) some issue about getting cows to pasture across the Turnpike. He sent me a copy of a 1922 letter; no tunnel was mentioned at that time. It seems clear that the tunnel was built in the 1948-50 era, not before.

(Please contact Sandy via her blog: RememberingDanvers.blogspot.com or Mr. Trask at the Danvers Archives if you have relevant information to share. Additionally, she has posted on her blog copies of Rob's photos and sketch, plus a photo of the two studying a map to pinpoint the location of this curious tunnel.)

(This submission has been edited, with the author's permission, from an article which appeared in the November 9, 2017 edition of the Danvers Herald.)