

The New Hampshire Turnpike

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Footnotes and Addendum by John Hirtle

In her diary for July 6, 1947, J. Pauline Hughes (1900 – 1992) of Tide Mill Road wrote that her brother Paul and his family had taken her and her mother “down to Peek’s to see traffic.” At that time, not only did all traffic between Portsmouth and Exeter have to negotiate the hills and curves of Portsmouth Avenue (but no traffic lights) as it passed through Greenland, but travelers between Maine and Massachusetts were effectively limited to US Route 1 (Lafayette Road). In the absence of television, a major source of entertainment for stay-at-homes on summer holiday weekends was viewing the lines of steam-ing cars (and drivers) crawling northward on Thursday or Friday and south-ward on Sunday or Monday (Peek’s Garage was located in Rye, at today’s Breakfast Hill Common)¹. If Greenland people didn’t have a chance to get away for the weekend, they could at least enjoy the suffering of those who did.

Between 1948 and 1950, however, the State of New Hampshire built a four-lane toll road across the Seacoast area, to speed drivers on their way while realizing a considerable amount of revenue.² While it was being built, the road made a handy pedestrian path between Portsmouth and Ocean and Breakfast Hill Roads. On Saturday, June 24, 1950 (a day before the Korean War broke out), after the expenditure of over \$7,000,000, the turnpike was opened to use by the general public, as the Portsmouth Herald announced, “with simple cer-

1. Specifically, the eastern (Rye) side of the intersection where Breakfast Hill Road and Washington Road meet Lafayette Road. At the time, the southern corner was a broad grassy field, which was filled with condos in 2021 – 2022, and the mini mall on the north corner was a thick stand of trees. The entry to Coakley Landfill was on the western corner, overshadowed by a ridge of trees where Rye Bethany Church now stands. A motel / restaurant stood opposite the exit of Dow Lane at the time, and next to present day Greystone Way, a minor tourist attraction of a miniature railway known as “Smokey Joe” stood in a grove of trees now occupied by a storage unit facility.

2. In fact, the Turnpike was planned in 1940s to join up with the Maine Turnpike, which was announced in 1941. This section was absorbed into the Interstate system, and is the shortest segment of Interstate 95 which runs from Houlton, Maine, to Key West, Florida.



Interstate 95 as it appeared in 1968. Note the billboards. Hughes Collection.

emonies at the Hampton interchange,” including a speech by Governor Sherman Adams.

Toll road officials reported today that 12,416 vehicles used the four-lane, divided highway between midnight Saturday and midnight Sunday. Uncounted thousands got in free rides Saturday after the opening ceremonies.³

Cost of a ride along the entire 15-mile length of road was fifteen cents, but those who left it at Hampton had to pay only a dime. Top speed was 60 miles an hour.

Part of the opening-day ceremonies was the dedication of a plaque in Seabrook, naming the new road the “Blue Star Memorial Highway, in honor of men and women serving in World War II.” This has been largely forgotten, as has the fact that the town of Greenland had bronze plaques attached to the new bridges on Ocean and Breakfast Hill Roads, dedicating them to the memory of the four Greenland men who died in the war. The Ocean Road Bridge was named for Charles H. Hayden and Reginald A. Trefethen; the Breakfast Hill Road Bridge, for John W. Weeks and Rev. Charles S. Blakeney (Federated Church pastor, and an Army chaplain).⁴

Constantly increasing traffic (despite tolls that rose to fifty cents) made it clear by the 1970s that the turnpike had to be widened to eight lanes. The work began early in 1973, and wasn’t completed until October 1974. Whether an eight-lane road will continue to be sufficient for the next fifty years remains to be seen.

3. At the time, the traffic was funneled through the Portsmouth Traffic Circle before crossing the Sarah M Long (middle) Bridge across the Piscataqua River. The Piscataqua River Bridge (the high level bridge) that presently carries Interstate 95 was not opened until 1972, in anticipation for the expansion of the highway.

4. The dedication plaques are discretely located on the outer side of the bridge railings where the bridges begin to protect them from the elements.



Interstate 95 as it appeared in 2021.

ADDENDUM

Interstate 95 is the shortest section of toll road in New Hampshire, and the most lucrative. The Hampton tollbooths were expanded several times to accommodate summer backups of traffic on the highway. By 2010, it became the first facility in New England to support open road tolling using the EZ Pass system. As of 2022, two axle vehicles were being charged two dollars in cash fare, or \$1.40 with use of the EZ Pass system. Those using the plaza leading to NH 101 are charged seventy-five cents in cash, or fifty-three cents with EZ Pass. In 2023, the state was starting to phase out the use of all manual collection booths in favor of EZ Pass and license plate recognition systems on other tolled sections of highway.

In addition, New Hampshire Liquor Stores were opened near the Hampton Toll Booths, the southbound store in 1981 and the northbound store in 1992.

As of 2023, brass dedication plaques on the Interstate 95 bridges may be found on the easterly sides of the bridges. The following are brief biographies of the men who the bridges are named for. The one on Ocean Road is named to honor Charles Herbert Hayden and Reginald Allen Trefethen:

Born in 1924, Charles Herbert Hayden served as an Aviation Radioman Third Class on Peter 11 Bureau #48126, Patrol Squadron 213, U.S. Navy based in North Carolina, during World War II. This unit operated the Martin PBM Mariner, a medium patrol bomber flying boat. On December 12, 1943, the squadron suffered its first loss of an aircraft during a training mission, with Hayden counted among the 12 men and four officers aboard. He was declared "Missing In Action" off the coast of North Carolina on December 13, 1943. A memorial marker for him may be found at Prospect Cemetery.

Born in 1926, Reginald Allen Trefethen was a Seaman 1st Class of the US Navy Reserve when he died on January 11, 1945, after a fall from a building in Boston, MA. He was laid to rest in Harmony Grove Cemetery in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

The bridge on Breakfast Hill Road is named to honor Chaplain Charles Blakeney and John W. Weeks:

Born in Canada around 1906, Chaplain Charles Blakeney was a minister in Greenland when he was accepted in the U.S. Army in 1943, despite his age (37), health issues, and being a Canadian citizen. He served with the 112th Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, which landed in France in July 1944. On September 1, 1944, he was hit by a sniper, and died the following day. He was laid to rest in Epinal American Cemetery, Epinal, France.

John W. Weeks is the last of those honored on the bridges. There are three notable John W. Weeks with connections to Greenland for whom the bridge may be named:

The first John Wingate Weeks was born in Greenland in 1781, and earned his living as a carpenter. During the War of 1812, he recruited a company for the Eleventh Regiment of the United State Infantry, and rose to the rank of major. After the war, he moved to Lancaster New Hampshire, and was active in local politics while assisting in naming several mountains in the Presidential Range. He would serve New Hampshire's third congressional district from 1829 – 1833, before passing away in Lancaster, where he was laid to rest.

The second John Wingate Weeks was his grand-nephew, born in Lancaster, NH in 1860. He would serve as a midshipman in the U.S. Navy from 1881 to 1883, and return to serve as a lieutenant during the Spanish-American War. His civilian career included ventures in civil engineering and finance before he turned his attention to politics. He served as a Massachusetts congressman from 1905 to 1913, and would serve in the Senate from 1913 to 1919. From 1921 to 1925 he would serve Presidents Harding and Coolidge as Secretary of War (now Secretary of Defense) until ill health forced him to retire. He passed away in 1926, and laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia.

A third, and most likely candidate for the bridge may be a John William Weeks, whose name appears as a member of the Merchant Marine on the town's World War Two Memorial. He was an ordinary seaman who served on the Liberty cargo ship *Sumner I. Kimball*. In January 1944, she was part of the west-bound convoy ON-219 en route from Britain to New York when bad weather separated her from the group. Sailing through stormy weather, the ship was found on January 16, 1944, by the German submarine *U-960* in the middle of the North Atlantic. While the *Sumner I. Kimball* tried to evade, and ram the sub, the *U-960* would torpedo the freighter, sinking her with the loss of all 69 men on board.