

A-CHS NEWSLETTER

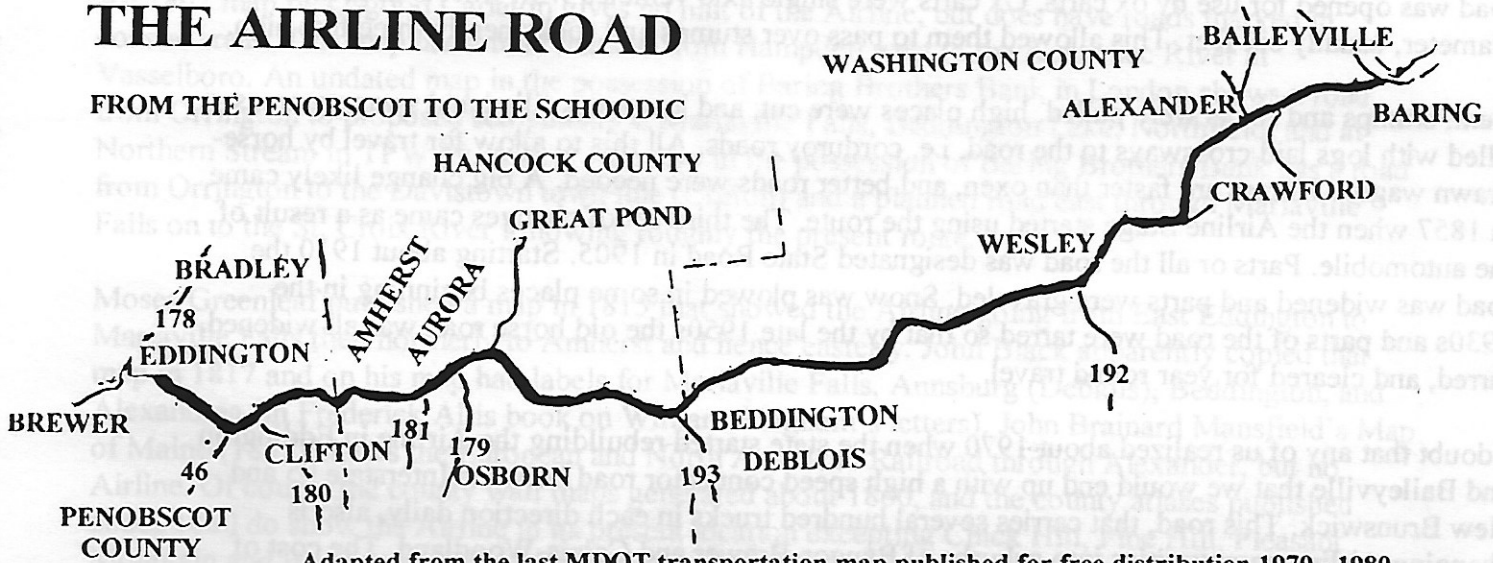
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THE AIRLINE ROAD

FROM THE PENOBSCOT TO THE SCHOODIC



Adapted from the last MDOT transportation map published for free distribution 1979 - 1980

What follows cannot be considered a history of the Airline. It is a collection of eclectic information about the people and the land along this infamous road that hopefully will give the reader a sense of its history. This information is arranged in two ways, geographically from west to east, where we tell something about each town and township; and topically, where we describe events or activities that affected the whole road. One such event, happening in the summer of 2003, is the placing of mile markers along the Airline. These are to aid the State Police in locating accidents.

This road was designed to attract settlers to buy the lands owned by William Bingham and later by Baring Brothers Bank. It was Revolutionary War General David Cobb, Bingham's agent, who felt that selling to farmers was the way for Bingham to profit from his investment. Cobb was responsible for laying out most of the roads associated with the Airline. Cobb retired in 1820. John Black, agent for Baring Brothers Bank, felt that lumber was the wealth that would provide his boss the needed profit. Black sold large blocks of land and developed the roads that followed the rivers.

TERMS ~ In this paper we will use names that are familiar to today's readers. All historic names will be referenced. Therefore, we will describe the towns by their present names even when telling of events that happened before the towns were incorporated. The section on *Airline Communities* will tell about the historic names of the towns.

Concerning the road that most know as the Airline, and the State of Maine calls Route 9, it too had historic names. The first was *General Cobb's Great Road from the Penobscot to the Schoodic*. General Cobb was William Bingham's agent here in Maine. For many years in the middle of the nineteenth century it was called the *Black's Road* after John Black, agent for Baring Brothers Bank. It eventually came to be called *The Airline*, after the Airline Stage Company that we will describe later. Of course, the road has had many local names. On early maps of Baileyville it is called the Alexander Road, and the folks of Clifton still refer to it as the Bangor Road. We will call this the Airline.

STAGES OF CONSTRUCTION ~ We know that Joseph Chadwick surveyed for a road running from the Penobscot to Quebec City in 1764. It is likely that Jones & Frie ran a line from the head of tide on the Penobscot to the head of tide on the Schoodic (St. Croix). That was in 1763. They were Joseph Frie (Fryeburg, Maine) and Samuel Jones who settled later in Robbinston. That spotted line became a foot path through the woods and since has gone through four stages of change. First a road was opened for use by ox carts. Ox carts were single axle vehicles with wheels of great diameter, usually six feet. This allowed them to pass over stumps and rocks nearly three feet high.

Next, stumps and rocks were pulled, high places were cut, and low areas filled and swampy areas filled with logs laid crossways to the road, i.e. corduroy roads. All this to allow for travel by horse-drawn wagon. Horses are faster than oxen, and better roads were needed. A big change likely came in 1857 when the Airline Stage started using the route. The third set of changes came as a result of the automobile. Parts or all the road was designated State Road in 1905. Starting about 1910 the road was widened and parts were graveled. Snow was plowed in some places beginning in the 1930s and parts of the road were tarred so that by the late 1950s the old horse road was all widened, tarred, and cleared for year round travel.

I doubt that any of us realized about 1970 when the state started rebuilding the Airline in Eddington and Baileyville that we would end up with a high speed connector road between Interstate 95 and New Brunswick. This road, that carries several hundred trucks in each direction daily, also is changing Airline communities into suburbs of Bangor-Brewer and Calais-Woodland. The cost of this highway reconstruction has been huge. For example, the last five jobs costs ranged from \$1,350,207 per mile to \$2,087,827 per mile. Six and ½ million was spent on the four projects here in Alexander. What changes will the road bring in the future? Will the east-west highway be four lanes? Will the route become Interstate 395?

MAJOR CHANGES IN THE ROUTE ~ All along the Airline, the roadway has been moved over the years. Most moves are minor such as straightening the old road. Some changes have been major, and those we will try to describe here. The trip we will take down the Airline will be from west to east, therefore, the changes will be treated in that order.

In East Eddington, the original road went along the Bangor Water Works Road, swinging east after passing Bald Mountain (now called Woodchuck Hill), crossed Route 180 north of Maplewood Cemetery, by DeBeck Pond and on to Mariaville Falls. We have found no reason why this road was abandoned.

The roads over Chick Hill in Clifton and Pine Hill on the line between TWP 22 and TWP 28 were both abandoned in the 1920s because they were too steep for automobile traffic. Pleasant Mountain in Devereaux and Breakneck Hill in TWP 31 have had major route changes during the past 30 years to reduce grade and sharp corners. The road over Tug Mountain in TWP 30 was never built. Several of the hills on the recently rebuilt road are still so steep that modern traffic has problems. (Day Hill 10% grade, Schoppee Hill 12% grade, Hardwood Hill 8% grade)

MAPS ~ Finding early maps of the Airline presented several problems. Most obvious is telling whether the line drawn on the map represents a road or a planned road. Secondly, many old maps are not dated, and some dated maps have had roads added at a later date. The third problem comes from the mapmakers, some did not sign their work, and some may have adjusted the map for their own benefit. A fourth problem is where mistakes on one map are repeated by later mapmakers. One example of this is the 1838 Lewis Robinson Map of Maine. This map, on display at the Holmes Cottage in Calais shows a road from Crawford through Cooper to Pembroke, but no road through

Alexander to Baileyville. There was a road from Crawford through Cooper, and there was the Airline through Alexander. This mistake was repeated on Colton's Maine Map of 1875, and again on Grenville Donham's 1905 Maine Map published in the Maine State Yearbook. All that being stated, here is what we have found.

An 1802 map by Osgood Carleton gives no hint of the Airline, but does have roads marked in coastal areas. This map has a road marked from Hampden west to the Kennebec River at Vasselboro. An undated map in the possession of Baring Brothers Bank in London shows a road from Orrington to proposed settlements at Mariaville Falls, Beddington Lake, Northfield, and at Northern Stream in TPW 19. A later map also in the possession of Baring Brothers Bank has a road from Orrington to the Davistown town line (Clifton) and a planned road east through Mariaville Falls on to the St. Croix River following roughly the present route.

Moses Greenleaf published a map in 1815 that showed the Airline going from East Eddington to Mariaville Falls then northerly to Amherst and hence easterly. John Black apparently copied that map in 1817 and on his map had labels for Mariaville Falls, Annsburg (Deblois), Beddington, and Alexandria (in Frederick Allis book on William Bingham's letters). John Brainard Mansfield's Map of Maine (1855) shows the European and North American Railroad through Alexander, but no Airline. Of course the county wall maps generated about 1860, and the county atlases published about 1880 do show the Airline in its present location excepting Chick Hill, Pine Hill, Pleasant Mountain and Breakneck Hill.

Of particular interest is a petition dated 1829 and found in the Hancock County deeds office, volume 2, page 242. It is addressed to the Supreme Judicial Court and asks for a four-rod road between Brewer and Baileyville. It states that Rufus Gilmore, Samuel Lowder, Jr. and Andrew Strong were appointed by the court as a committee to view the proposed route at the expense of the petitioners. This committee was to make a plan for the new road and determine the probable cost of construction. The plan for the road covers 15 pages detailing the entire 81 miles, 160 rods. The bill for all this was \$613.59 and was paid by the three counties. "...thence E 1 dg S 20 rods to Carleton Stream, 3 rods wide... to a stake marked XXR..." Carleton Stream and Little Carleton Stream are both in Washington County. A stream 3 rods, or 51 feet, wide *likely* is the main Machias River and the other is likely Pembroke Stream. Tracing this route on a modern map would be a great adventure.

What may be the first Maine State Highway map is dated 1931. It has our road labeled Air Line Road and indicated that some of it is graveled, and the rest is unimproved. None of the road was macadamized. Places listed on this map are Alexander, Crawford, Pokey, Pines, Wesley, Beddington, Aurora, Amherst, Clifton, and East Eddington. All these were names of post office sites, Pokey being in the south end of Crawford, and Pines being that part of Wesley east of Day Hill. Source: Osher Map Library, USM.

The earliest State Highway map *with route numbers* is dated 1934. This map labels the Airline as Route 9, and shows the following routes; 191, 192, 193, 179, 180, 181, and 175 (now 46). The map shows Route 9 from Berwick on the New Hampshire border to Route 1 in Baileyville. Source: Maine State Archives 1108-40, box 67.

A 1938 map of Maine bearing that stamp CONFIDENTIAL shows only the principal Routes of Military Importance. The Airline was one, as was coastal Route 1, and Route 2 from Bangor to Houlton. Source: MSA 1108.0318, box 67.

