

REDISCOVERED

It may be only a matter of a few years before the new 'Pike through the town, connecting with the Mohawk Trail, will be completed and make it possible to drive to the business section of Boston in forty-five minutes or less. Other towns, with a few exceptions, have found these heavy-traffic highways of little advantage; and it is sad to think of the transformation of this winding and tree-shaded old village street, one of the loveliest remaining in Massachusetts, into a modern speedway.

George Francis Marlowe
The Old Bay Paths, 1942

Thanks both to Henry Knox in the winter of 1775-76 retrieving the cannon from Fort Ticonderoga for George Washington besieging Boston and to Massachusetts and New York in 1926-27 choosing to memorialize the effort with a heritage trail, you can drive Knox's route without ever getting on the Massachusetts Turnpike or any other superhighway.

For me, this was one of the great charms of completing the Henry Knox Trail. Before, I wasn't sure it was possible.

Henry Knox took two months; we took a week.

Marlowe quoted another's account:

With every mile of the winding road, and its miles are all too few, the wanderer retreats about a hundred years backward into time ...

The Native American trails through the wilderness areas that Knox traveled are gone and even the local roads of the 1920s are hardly the same. But suspend your disbelief for surely pavement merely covers much of Knox's original path.

My wife and I tried duplicating Knox's experience in present terms, leaving the Boston area and stopping in Manhattan at Fraunces Tavern for lunch before driving up the Hudson River to Albany. Fraunces Tavern is a unique Revolutionary War experience on its own with a menu of well-prepared, traditional offerings. Knox may have lunched here on his way to Fort Ticonderoga and was certainly here for Washington's 1783 farewell dinner.

Or instead, approach the fort through Vermont's rolling farmland. The Green Mountain Boys and MA/CT militia would have passed this way with their leaders Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold to capture the fort (and its cannon) from the British in May of 1775.



Fraunces Tavern

Let the seven-minute crossing on the Fort Ticonderoga Ferry, operating since 1759, be your time machine, crossing Lake Champlain near where Allen and Arnold must have crossed.

When Massachusetts and New York thought to create the Trail, the idea of tourism was just coming into its own in a world transformed by Ford's affordable Model T. Improved roads and thousands of gas stations had emerged by the mid-1920s. The economy was booming. The workweek was growing shorter. For the first time, average Americans were traveling for pleasure.



Fort Ticonderoga from Mount Defiance

Fort Ticonderoga itself was finishing a total restoration project converting it into today's tourist attraction (May - October). The fort is in better condition now than in Knox's day (the British had let it run down).

Stay until they fire the cannon, and don't miss driving (or climbing) to the peak of Mount Defiance for a spectacular overview of the fort and lake stretching for miles and miles. (End a perfect summer's day with a swim off Black Point Public Beach.)

Then it's down the Hudson River and across the center of Massachusetts. There are the Saratoga battlefields to ponder and colonial homes and mansions to see in both rural and urban locations.

But there's also Cohoes Falls that Knox stopped at checking out alternate routes and described as "stupendous".



Cohoes Falls

Lake George is a great fishing hole. Rent a canoe and cruise the Sudbury River. There's the quaint town of Kinderhook. (Home and final resting place of President Martin Van Buren.) In Springfield, more original muskets than you can imagine are in the nation's first armory. Its creation dates back to the Revolution. (And also, there's the fantasy world of the Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden.)



Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden

Book an overnight in Great Barrington's Wainwright Inn where Knox reportedly stayed. (And breakfast in the wood paneled, barrel ceilinged Boulevard Diner along the Trail in Worcester which is itself a time traveling experience.)

I've attached our itinerary done in two phases in November and January to mirror the seasons of Knox's journey. But many of the New York attractions are only open spring to fall. Summer was Upstate New York's original tourist attraction. Endless more possibilities if you go in the summer.



Fort Edward Lock #7

The urban centers along the Trail remain the same after 250 years - Albany, Springfield, and Worcester. Over that time, they came to be associated more with the Industrial Revolution than the American Revolution.

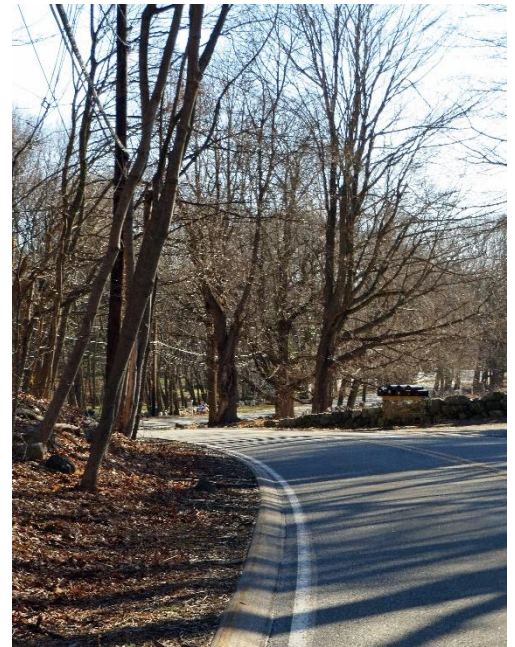
By the 1920s, canals and railroads had the area thriving. The Henry Knox Trail was created and celebrated then as a unifying attraction for generations to come. But by the late 1950s, the region was bypassed by highways and globalization and the Trail was just as quickly forgotten.

Bypassed not gone - Marlowe was wrong about the Pike. Along the Henry Knox Trail you still find the “winding and tree-shaded old village street” - in Shrewsbury and Southborough, around Framingham’s Centre Common, and along Wayland’s Old Connecticut Path.

Marlowe would be pleased that, in his words, “much of the charm of years gone by remains”.

Rediscover it yourself. Take a week like us or like Knox, take two months.

Steven Glovsky of Wayland can be contacted at TravelsWithTwain.com.



Old Connecticut Path

(This is the last in a series of pieces about the Henry Knox Trail leading up to my talk at the Wayland Historical Society’s Annual Meeting at 7:00 P.M. on Wednesday, May 11, 2022.)