

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BOURNE

Bourne is the youngest town on the Cape and one of the newest in Massachusetts, having split from the Town of Sandwich and incorporated in 1884. By the time of the Civil War the area that was to become Bourne had grown into a major industrial center and its residents reportedly did not want to travel all the way to Sandwich to conduct town business.

The first European presence was felt in this area shortly after the Pilgrims established Plymouth Colony. Within a few years the Colony was trading goods with the Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam, meeting on boats in the Monument River near what is now Bourne Village. In 1627 they built a trading post at Aptucxet, a replica of which sits today on the original foundation.

For thousands of years before that time, the upper Cape was the summer fishing and hunting grounds of the indigenous people now known as the Herring Pond Tribe of the Wampanoag Nation. For the next 200 years the area continued to be lightly populated by farmers, loggers and fishermen. The only industries of note were the Herring River Grist Mill, which opened in 1695 to process the grain grown by local farmers, and the salt works on Mashnee Island.

In 1821, however, the Bournedale Iron Works began business, marking the beginning of the area's industrial revolution. A year later the Pocasset Iron Company was established at the head of the Pocasset River on County Road. In 1825 the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company began making decorative glass products, and in 1826 the Keith and Ryder wagon company began building farm wagons and prairie schooners for sale to pioneering families that were moving west to open new frontiers.

With the arrival of the railroad in 1847, the area's industrial development turned serious. The Pocasset Iron Company became the Tahanto Iron Company and expanded into a large factory that dominated the local landscape. You can still see remnants of the water works that supplied this industrial center throughout the Four Ponds Conservation Area off Barlows Landing Road.



A rare photo from the Bourne Historic Archives of the Tahanto Iron Company looking northwest from County Road. The pond remains but all the structures are gone. Date unknown but likely before 1900.

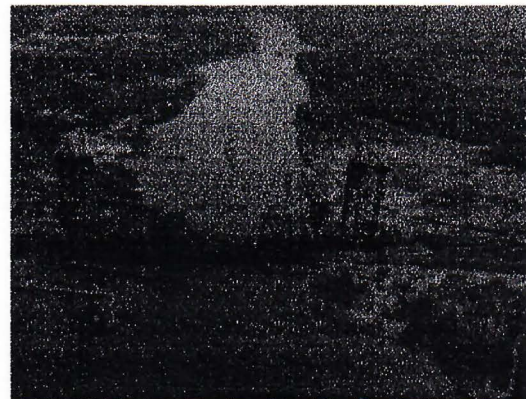
Keith and Ryder moved from South Sandwich to the area now known as Sagamore and began building railroad cars under the name of Keith Car and Manufacturing Company. By the turn of the twentieth century, it had become one of the world's largest manufacturers of railroad freight cars, extending two miles along the Scusset River. The Bournedale Iron Works grew too, as the primary supplier of iron fittings for the Keith cars.

The glass works was located on the Cape, not for its sand, but for its abundant forests that would fuel the furnaces and refractories. By the time Bourne split from Sandwich in 1884, however, the upper Cape and Plymouth area had been stripped of most of its trees.

Three of the earliest trails on Cape Cod still exist as local roads in Bourne. Sandwich Road, County Road, and Turpentine Road all appear on a 1627 map. Turpentine Road, which is now located within the military reservation, was named for a factory that produced pine tar products for shipbuilding and for refinement into turpentine. This company began operations in 1850 but disappeared along with the trees by 1900.

Construction of the Cape Cod Canal in 1914 was undoubtedly the most significant event in Bourne's history, but turned out to be of far less value to the Town than its promoters imagined. The stated purpose of the canal was to provide a safe route for ships and barges carrying goods up and down the coast. The locals, however, welcomed the canal as a catalyst for new industrial development in the Monument and Scusset River valleys.

The Canal not only failed to bring new industry to Bourne, but also cut through the middle of the Keith factory complex and separated Bournedale from the railroad, which was relocated to the south side of the canal. It did succeed as a safe shipping route, however, and in the 1930's it was enlarged and realigned into the channel that you see now. The photo above shows the railroad bridge under construction in 1933.



The first known plan for the Cape Cod Canal was recorded in 1676, nearly 240 years before it actually opened. A century later, in 1775, George Washington ordered a survey for the canal, and over the next 139 years many plans were drawn and false starts made before Cape Cod Bay and Buzzards Bay were finally connected by water.

The incorporation of Bourne in 1884 also marked the beginning of the summer tourist industry. The railroad had made it possible for wealthy families from Boston to get to the shore quickly and conveniently. From the early 1880's to the late 1920's huge "cottages" were built on every promontory from Taylor's Point to Scraggy Neck. These summer houses often made today's "trophy homes" look puny by comparison. These houses were usually built on the upland areas. At that time, only the poorest people lived right on the shore. One exception, and one of the smaller "cottages", was Gray Gables, President Grover Cleveland's summer white house.

Bourne's most recent historic era revolves around the military, which dominated the town's economy and culture for nearly a century, beginning in 1911 as National Guard training center, and expanding in 1935 when the Army began building Camp Edwards. Joint Base Cape Cod still occupies nearly 40 percent of Bourne's land area and is home to the Massachusetts National Guard, the Coast Guard's Air Station Cape Cod, an Air Force radar facility and cyber security lab, and the Veteran's Memorial Cemetery.



Buzzards Bay Village reached its peak of activity during the military years. Most of the soldiers going to and coming from Camp Edwards traveled by train. Buzzards Bay provided the closest place for soldiers on liberty to go. Postcards and photos from those years show a very busy Main Street, crowded with cars and people. They also show that nearly every storefront was a tavern, hotel, restaurant, or other place of entertainment.

In its early years, Buzzards Bay was a port for lumber and grain that were shipped by schooner to cities along the coast. When the railroad arrived, it took over much of that shipping. The village quickly became a major transportation center, hauling freight from the many industries in the area, and bringing passengers to the shore.

Buzzards Bay is now enjoying a renaissance as Bourne's Downtown. With the Massachusetts Maritime Academy and a revitalized town park at one end, and the Town Hall, Hampton Inn, and Veterans Memorial Community Center near the other end, new businesses are opening in renovated buildings. A 100,000 gallon per day wastewater treatment facility will enable more redevelopment and new construction, creating a town center where residents can live, work, shop, and play without having to drive someplace else.

Today Bourne is in a period of transition. Summer houses are being converted to year-round second homes or retirement homes. New housing is built to suburban standards for commuters to metropolitan Boston. The military presence is fading as the country's strategic plans shift from soldiers to high-tech arms and equipment. Bourne is becoming a self-sustaining community of high-tech industries, educational facilities, local businesses, and homes. Our challenge today is to guide that transition so that the Town of Bourne, with its many villages, remains a delightful place to live and work.