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"Accommodation" Provides Thrills For Those Visiting Provincetown

Writer Gives Graphic Word Picture of Jaunt Through
Our Streets On Ancient Bus

An institution which has contributed its part to the fame of Provincetown through the years is the town bus, "tram" to some, "accommodations" to others, but to everyone a vehicle for small town enjoyment at its best. To take our bus as a serious means of transportation is a mistake. Its whole atmosphere is as casual as its schedule.

But "E. B." in a recent issue of the Christian Science Monitor gives a word picture of the Provincetown "accommodation" and here it is under the title of "Round Trip."

The bus was jogging up the "front street" of Provincetown, and I was riding in it. Not because I wanted to get somewhere. Not because I had no other means of traveling. Simply because a ride on the bus, or, if you want to be old-fashioned, the "accommodation," is a recognized local form of entertainment—like going to the movies, or going for a sail.

The evening was fine, the yellow sky in the west like clear yellow ice, with an indefinable and thrilling promise of cold. The bus, as usual, was chatty as a reception-room. One can learn a lot of news, and still more opinion, by keeping one's ears open there. Of course, I listened shamelessly, while I watched the yellow reflection of the sky on the smooth harbor that dodged in and out of view beyond the jumbled houses and fish-lofts.

An idle speculation occurred to me. Expressing it with the freedom which is Provincetown's specialty, I asked the driver in the row ahead of me, "How old is this bus, anyway?"

There are no "Do Not Talk to the Driver" signs here. The driver knew me and I knew him.

"Twenty-three years old," he replied proudly. "Old enough to vote."

"I can remember the bus before this one," a strongly down-East voice contributed from the row behind me. "It was drawn by horses." Recognizing the voice as belonging to an acquaintance, Miss Snow, I turned around and said good evening. Miss Snow remarked that the sky was real pretty tonight.

The driver changed gears, and we jounced uphill with a terrific roar. The old buses are built high in the air, on the majestic, flaring style no longer favored by bus-builders today. To help the reader form his mental picture, I should add that they are open, except for a sort of regal canopy overhead. They really would not look out of place in an eastern ceremonial procession. On rainy days they chug around buttoned up in big raincoats.

"Would you wait a minute?" requested a man sitting in the front row with the driver. "I want to post this letter." Brakes were applied, the man descended, walked back to a mail box, posted his letter, and returned. We were off again.

"They'll still wait to let you post a letter," Miss Snow remarked. "But they ain't obligin' as they used to be. Folks used to run out with pans of biscuits and say, 'Won't you please take these to my aunt at the West End?' and they'd do it. I've seen them deliver shoes to be mended, too, in the old days."

"I remember how they used to stop and wait while people went into stores and bought provisions," said another friend, who had just got on with her two grandchildren.

"We can't do those things no more," put in the driver, who had been listening. At this point he stopped the ancient equipage before an antique shop and loudly tooted its horn. In response to the tooting a head was thrust out of a window and yelled, "Hold it! I'm a-comin!"

The bus waited, its engine chugging. "You have to oblige a good customer," the driver commented, with the New England equivalent of manana. A man came running out, hoisted himself into a seat—which, by the way, is no small acrobatic triumph—and we proceeded.

The driver burst into spontaneous song, rendering "I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby," and "Carry Me Back To Old Virginny." Not badly, considering that he was maneuvering a ponderous vehicle through a street hardly wider than

a cowpath. On that street one is subject to a constant illusion of being about to collide with a car or a fence or a house. But there is never a collision.

Soon we reached the "back street", and began rattling recklessly down a steep hill, to the strains of "Santa Lucia." Some Portuguese youths in the back row added their rich baritones. "It does seem as if it would tip over, doesn't it!" exclaimed a woman who was evidently new to Provincetown.

"It never will," Miss Snow assured her. "'Tain't nothin' now compared to what it used to be. The buses used to race up the front street, two abreast. Sometimes they'd get right off the street and be half on the sidewalk."

One has to have seen the "front street" to know why the newcomer looked appalled.

But my ten cents worth of round trip was over. I rang the bell and, holding carefully to the bars which supported the regal canopy, managed to screw myself down and out of the bus. As I went up my walk and into the house I passed the garage where, resting unused, was a perfectly able car.

E. B.



And here we are, a little more up to date, with
balloon tires! About 1925.

Cape Cod Standard-Times- 9-1-39

Tip-offs on the Cape-tip

To year-round residents and veteran Summer visitors Provincetown's "street line buses" are an accepted part of the gay Summer scene but they are distinct novelties to newcomers.

These widely-divergent reactions are understandable when we realize that the buses are virtual institutions here and, horse-driven or motor-powered, have served the traveler for nearly 40 years.

Before they were motorized the buses were drawn by a span of two horses and their progress along "Front Street" was announced by the jingling of bells attached to the harness. Convenience and not speed has always been the watchword, even after the buses were motorized, and until about five years ago it was common practice for the vehicles to stop and wait at various business establishments while patrons transacted their business within.

Today the buses operate on timed schedules but there is a certain carryover from the old days in that there is a spirit of informality not associated with metropolitan transportation systems.