

The History of Public Transportation in Tuscola County

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In the not so distant past public transportation was the popular way to travel to and around Tuscola County.

In the 1850's settlers and lumbermen began extensively to build roads, and during the 1860's and early 1870's stage coach lines were the major and most popular means of public transportation.

In 1863 Vassar was part of the Vassar to Pine Run Stage line.

By 1867 Joseph Garland of Pine Run was proprietor of the Tuscola and Vassar stage line.

By 1869 another stage coach business in Tuscola County was operated from Centreville, which is now the City of Caro, and was called the Centreville & Vassar Stage Line.

It was owned and operated by Alexander Cooper.

Before the mid-1870's before the introduction of the railroad in Tuscola County there was a vigorous competition for the control of stage coach transportation.

In 1870 the New Stage & Express Line with four horses and the Popular Stage Line traveled between Caro and Saginaw daily rolling through Wahjamega, Watrousville, and Vassar.

These two stage lines typically left Caro each day in the morning—except Sunday—at 3:00 A M, arrive in Vassar at 7:00 AM, and ended the first leg of their travel log in Saginaw at 10:00 AM.

After a mid-day sojourn in Saginaw the stage then left at station 2:00 PM, arrive in Vassar at 6:00 PA, and then return to Caro by 10 PM.

Many passengers boasted of visiting Saginaw, transacting business, and returning home to Caro that same day.

Vital to the network the stage lines later in addition connected riders with the East Saginaw Railroad Station.

By 1862 the Flint & Pere Marquette Railroad opened tracks from Saginaw to Mount Morris and shortly afterward extended the rail line on to Flint with a Detroit connection.

In 1873 the Detroit & Bay City Railroad opened tracks from Otter Lake to Vassar.

The railway then went on to Bay City.

The following year the East Saginaw and St. Clair Railroad opened rail tracks from Saginaw to Vassar.

The line eventually went on to Port Huron.

In 1878 a stage line operated by Michael Curry left the Everett House in East Saginaw daily for Gates 12 miles away, \$1; Watrousville, 21 miles, \$1.50; Wahjamega, 25 miles, \$1.75; Caro, 30 miles, \$3; Sebewaing, 38 miles, \$3; Newbury, 41 miles, \$2.75; Vassar, 20 miles, \$1; and Unionville, 36 miles, \$2.50.

The Saginaw & Vassar Stage Line was also owned by Mr. Curry and likewise left East Saginaw daily—Tuscola, 18 miles, 75 cents; and Vassar, 20 miles, \$1.

In Vassar the stage coach would typically stop at the Jewell House kept by Horace Montague and Mr. Curry.

Another stage line the Unionville, Sebewaing, and Bay City Mail & Stage Line was owned by George Linder.

A most noteworthy affair occurred in 1878 when the Michigan Central Railroad opened a line of tracks between Caro and Vassar that was a monumental event for the Caro community.

The building of this railroad would on the other hand initiate the demise of the local stage line.

By the time that the Michigan Central Railroad opened its tracks to Caro, Mr. Alexander Cooper retired from the stage coach business.

Mr. Cooper's employee David Hemerick nonetheless stayed in the livery and stage coach business and partnered with Solomon Utter.

They then owned a stage coach line that ran from Caro to Vassar.

The Utter & Hemerick Stage Office was located in Caro at the Exchange Hotel.

The Exchange Hotel was located just west of the Tuscola County Court House, and the Utter & Hemerick livery barn was at the rear of the hotel.

Because of the competition from the Michigan Central Railroad, in 1883, Utter and Hemerick discontinued the Vassar line.

However the livery firm kept the line that went on between Caro and Cass City.

In Tuscola County towns as elsewhere, it was common for stage lines to pick up riders at the local hotel.

The stage lines however were fighting a losing battle, as time when on, as rail transportation was quicker, smoother, and cheaper than stage coach transportation.

Stage coaches as well went over roads that recurrently were plank roads and were very —dusty or muddy—and corduroy rough.



The Michigan Central Caro Railroad Station

By 1894 the Michigan Central Railroad would leave Caro at 8 AM in the morning, arrive in Wahjamega 10 minutes later, get to Watrousville in 20 minutes, and then stop in Vassar in 35 minutes.

The rail service provided three quick trips scheduled between Caro and Vassar and then back each day.

In 1904 there was however still a number of stage lines in Tuscola County.

On the other hand they mostly connected smaller rural towns with rail stations in larger towns.

Even as the speed, comfort, and low price of rail travel brought the demise of the local stage lines, the motor bus the next invention, curtailed or abridged both stage and rail as workable means of public transportation.

As early as the 1920's the Elliott Motor Bus Line transported riders from Cass City to Bad Axe and back.

It then went on to Imlay City and even further to Pontiac.

As roads improved so did motor bus travel.

In the 1920's and 30's there were three bus lines that served the major part of Tuscola County.

They were the Young Bus Line, the Hill Bus Line, and the Flint, Caro, & Sebewaing Bus Company.

The Young Bus Line was started in 1922 and transported riders east and west between Caro and Bad Axe.

The Flint, Caro, & Sebewaing Bus Company began in the 1930's and traveled north and south through Tuscola County.

The Hill Bus Line was established in 1938, dash from Saginaw to Caro, quickly set off for Cass City, and ultimately traveled on to Bad Axe.

In 1945 just after World War II the Indian Trails Bus Company expanded into the Thumb of Michigan.

Their coaches were named after Native Indian Chiefs that made their advertising very aspiring and appealing.

In August 1945 the three bus lines described above that served Michigan Thumb and Tuscola County were incorporated into Indian Trails.

George Hill owner of the Hill Bus Line became the sales manager in the Thumb for the Indian Trails.

Nonetheless inspite of many people's best efforts within just a few couple of decades or a bit more, the sight of the Indian Trails bus line in Tuscola County would also fade away in the late 20th century.

Established in 1998 mass transit in central Tuscola County today is provided by Thumbody Express that provides rides for residents of Almer and Indianfields Township and that provides besides limited service to Cass City, Mayville, and Vassar.

At times it may seem that the days of public transportation are nearly over.

People today desire their own independence and today the cost to travel in one's own vehicle is relatively low—but you never know!

If there would be a rise in the price of gasoline or a rise in the need to serve those who cannot drive, the rumor may go around that the revitalization of public transportation is certainly possible or feasible.