

History of

South Hamilton's Business Center

Part 1: The Depot



1894 - Hamilton Depot – Boston & Maine Railroad station house (*left*) built in 1862 and Lester Libby's grocery store (*right*) built soon after the station house. Photo, courtesy Wenham Museum

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The first recorded business, at the railroad depot on Liberty Street (*now Bay Road*) was a grocery store and coal yard. For several years, a Mr. Taylor ran the grocery store. Next, in October 1879, Emerson P. Dodge, who owned the property, had the grocery.¹

Train station

Three year later, in September 1862, Eastern Railroad built a new depot, in Hamilton, next to the County Road. The road, from the Wenham town line to Walnut Street (*then Wenham Neck Road*), was called Liberty Street. (*In 1890, when the town established names for all streets, Liberty became Main Street,⁴⁰ and in 1965 it was named Bay Road.*)

In 1860, Emerson P. Dodge of Boston sold the property to Eastern Railroad.⁵¹ Dodge also sold to the railroad a two and three-quarter-acre section on the east side of the railroad tracks that was in both Hamilton and Wenham. In the Hamilton portion, Eastern Railroad built a windmill-powered pump, a water tank, and two storage sheds; and, in Wenham section, an engine turntable and engine house.⁵¹

Emerson Dodge's father was John Thorne Dodge, Jr., a seventh generation descendant of Richard Dodge, one of the town's first inhabitants. Dodge owned a farm on the other

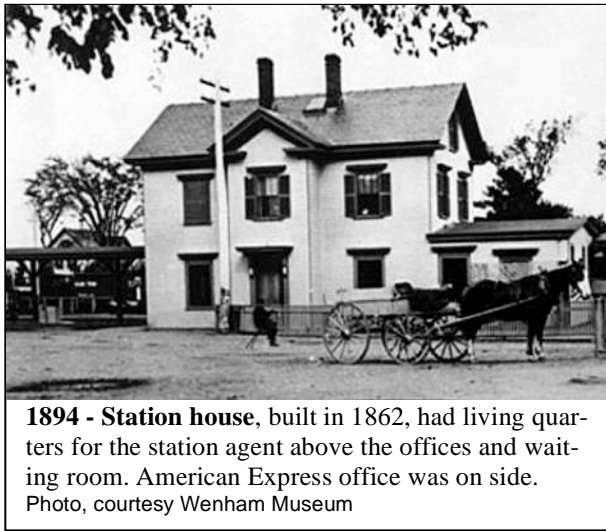
side of the tracks, which now is the Hamilton Crossing shopping center.

The 22 x 37 ft., two-story station house (*see picture above and next page*) was on the west side of the single track and faced onto Liberty Street.⁵ In front of the station house, there was a large open area for easy access by carriages transporting passengers to and from the station.

At street level, the station house had a ticket office, ladies' and gentlemen's toilets, and a telegraph office. On the second floor, there were living quarters for the station agent and telegrapher, initially Daniel Rust.⁵

A wood platform, alongside the track, ran the entire length of the depot lot. A freight house, 18 ft. x 50 ft., was about 100 feet south of the station house.⁵ Originally, there was not a baggage house at the north end of the station house.

A key reason for building the Hamilton depot likely was the opening, in 1860, of the Asbury Grove Methodist Camp Grounds, in the west part of the town. Throughout each week of the summer, thousands of people from surrounding towns traveled to Hamilton to attend Methodist religious services.⁴¹ From the depot on Liberty Street, wagons transported people (*called barges*), to and from the campground.⁴²



1894 - Station house, built in 1862, had living quarters for the station agent above the offices and waiting room. American Express office was on side. Photo, courtesy Wenham Museum



2012 - Station platform, built in 2002 on west side of railroad tracks, replaced the depot building and platform destroyed by fire in 2000. Photo, J. Hauck

In 1884, the Boston and Maine Railroad (B & M RR) leased the tracks of the financially stressed Eastern Railroad. Then, in 1890, the Eastern Railroad ceased to exist, when it became part of the B & M RR.⁵

That same year, the Hamilton Annual Town Report made the first reference to the train station as being at the "Depot Square:"⁴⁰ an indication of it being a place visited by many people.

Located in Hamilton and close to the Wenham town line, the train station, from 1885 to 1905, had several names. It began as the Wenham Depot, next the Wenham and Hamilton Depot and finally the Hamilton and Wenham Depot.⁵

By 1900, the B&M RR station had significantly expanded. On the west side of the tracks, there was a station house; and a covered platform. There also was an American Express office, which previously had been on Railroad Avenue, alongside the Smith Block.

On the east side of the tracks, in Hamilton, there was a windmill and water tank, and two storage sheds; and, in Wenham, an engine turntable and an engine house. Just south of



1900 - Water tank, on east side of railroad tracks, provided pressurized water to hydrants on Railroad Ave. Photo, courtesy Wenham Museum

the train station, in Hamilton, the company also built a freight house.

The water tank (see picture below) not only provided water for the train engines, but also, beginning in 1929, pressurized water to four hydrants installed on Railroad Avenue to Willow Street, for fire protection of the businesses in the area.¹

An early business at the station was a livery service providing carriage transportation for arriving train passengers. Elmer E. Clark likely operated the livery service.¹

By 1900, Arthur C. Cummings owned the livery and boarding stable in depot square. Ten years earlier, he came to Hamilton from Topsfield to be the depot baggage master. Later, he bought Clark's carriage business and dwelling on Main Street.¹ Cummings was a selectmen from 1907 to 1936.

The first established business generally believed to have been at the depot, according to Janice P. Pulsifer, in her book "Changing Times," was a grocery store and coal yard. A Mr. Taylor was the owner.¹ It likely was at the north end of the property, where the Community Package Store was built in 2004. In October 1879, Emerson P. Dodge reopened the grocery, which had been closed.¹ There is no record of when the Dodge store closed, or when the building was removed.

The depot had several employees: a baggage master, in a small building beside the station, a Station Agent, an Assistant Station Agent and a crossing tender. The Station Agent had a booth where he sold tickets. A taxi stand was at the north side of the station (see picture, pg. 5).⁵⁴



2014 - Community Package Store, built in 2004, on site that likely was a grocery store and coal yard, about 1862. Photo, J. Hauck

The Hamilton Package Store building is newest building at Depot Square.

View of Depot Square from the railroad crossing now much different from 1894.

While macadam covers most of the Square, two attractive areas are:

Patio behind the Package Store and,

Planting area beside crosswalk to train platforms.



2014 - Depot Square has Community Package Store building at north end, and Talbot's building at south end . Photo, J. Hauck



1894 - Depot Square had depot building, train platform and building with Holmes and Libby stores. Photo, courtesy Wenham Museum



2014 - One of two areas now at Depot Square with plantings was created in 1963. Rocks and daffodils have replaced original shrubs and small leaf Linden tree. Photo, J. Hauck



2014 - At the north end of Depot Square, on the short, triangular area, is an attractive, brick-paved patio. Photo, J. Hauck

One of the longest serving Station Agents was Aaron D. Bradeen, holding this position for 25 years (1920-1945). He also was very active in town government and was a selectman for 3 years.⁵⁵

An exciting time for young people was watching express trains pass over Bay Road.

Lifelong Hamilton resident, Ed Haraden recalls, from when he was a boy, watching the 5 P.M. evening express, the "silver streamer," speeding through Hamilton on its way from Boston to Portland: "Standing near the Main Street crossing, we marveled at the people eating in the dining car."⁵⁴

In January 1960, the Town of Hamilton seized, by eminent domain, the depot property and awarded \$14,999 to Fairfield Estates Trust, which in 1958 had acquired the property from the Boston and Maine Railroad.⁵² The town purchased the property for parking, thereby reducing traffic congestion in the downtown area.^{6, 9, 10, 14, 16}

Through meetings with the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities and B&M RR, the town was not required to maintain a waiting room. This allowed the town, in 1961, to remove the abandoned depot building and remodel the small baggage building, on the north end of the depot building, to be a waiting room (see picture below).

An agreement was made for the taxi company operator, Amos Fuller, Jr. of Hamilton, to provide janitor services in exchange for free office space.^{15, 2} Fuller installed automatic gas heat, which was very appreciated by people waiting on cold mornings.¹⁴



1960 - Taxi service at depot square began in 1932 and halted in 1973.

Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

Next to run the taxi service, at the depot, was George Anderson. He lived close by on Elliot Street, right off Railroad Avenue. The depot taxi service stopped about 1973.⁵⁴

In order to improve the appearance of the depot square, the town, in 1963, created a small planting area, at the back of the lot, close to the railroad track. Surrounded by granite curbing and a sidewalk, and filled with loam, it had a little-leaf Linden tree and low shrubs, all said to require "a minimum of maintenance."⁵⁹ (*An attractive pyramidal-shaped tree, but one that could grow 60 to 70 ft. high and be quite broad at its base.*)

At the time, there was not a crosswalk between the east and west platforms. One was built in 2002.

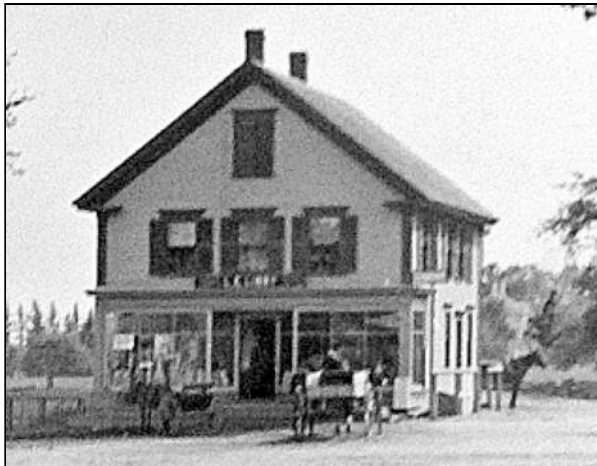
By 2014, following years of "minimum maintenance," the once-attractive planting area only had weeds growing in it. They were removed and replaced with a line of rocks (*extremely low maintenance*), and daffodil plants (see picture, pg. 4).

In 1964, the train service through Hamilton, while still provided by the B&M RR, began to be subsidized by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). Four years later, in 1968, Hamilton became part of the Massachusetts MBTA district,⁶¹ thereby assuring continuation of a depot in the town.

A fire, in 2000, destroyed the former baggage building/waiting room and the platform. In 2002, as part of a \$2.6 million improvement project, the MBTA built a 700-ft. platform on the east side of the tracks (see picture, pg. 3). Situated further south alongside the track and just over the town line in Wenham, the platform eliminated a previous problem of trains blocking Bay Road when they stopped at the old station located in Hamilton. The MBTA also built, north of the main platform, a high-level platform for handicapped accessibility.⁵⁶

On Mar. 16, 2004, Hamilton sold (\$260,000) a section (4,246 sq. ft.) of the land at the north corner of the depot property to Drew Marc Aurele and Jane M. O'Leary. They built a two-story building, 45 Bay Rd. It has an apartment, on the second floor, and the Community Package Store, on the first floor.²⁸ (see picture, pg. 4)

Previously, the liquor store, which Aurele and O'Leary bought in 1985, was in the Hamilton shopping center, on the other side of the railroad tracks. A long-time employee at the liquor store, Richard Regan of Hamilton, stayed on when the business moved.



1894 – Lester E. Libby's grocery store occupied the entire first floor. It also was a post office. Photo, courtesy Wenham Museum



1900 - Charles Holmes' lunchroom (left) and Lester Libby's newspaper and bike repair store (right), post office in center. Photo, courtesy Wenham Museum



1940 to 1958, Hamilton Police station was on the 2nd floor. Photo, 1972, Hamilton Historical Society



1975 - Hamilton Hardware Store closed and building sold. Photo, 1974, Hamilton Historical Society



1975 - Talbot's women's clothing store opened, replacing Hamilton Hardware that opened in 1926. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



2014 - Talbot's store, other than sign change, remains the same as it did when it opened in 1993. Photo, J. Hauck, 2014

At the north end of their property, on the short, triangular area, the new owners built an attractive, brick-paved patio, containing a bench, and a compass inlay, at the center, surrounded by shrubs and groundcover. (see *picture, pg. 4*)

Grocery Store

Originally, the property south of that on which the station stood was part of a large estate, which reached back into Wenham and was owned by Thomas P. Pingree.

Not long after the railroad station was built, in 1862, widow Harriet E. Pingree (*nee Harriet E. Dodge*) of Wenham had a grocery store built south of the station and alongside Liberty Street.¹ The Central Grocery store, which occupied the whole first floor, faced towards the station, rather than onto the street.¹

In 1884, John Merrill of Wenham was running the grocery store. The Wenham Depot Post Office also was in his store. Merrill was the Postmaster¹ of what was considered a regional post office, serving parts of Wenham and South Hamilton.

Four years later, 1888, Charles A. Hills and Co. owned the store, and advertised "choice family groceries, a large assortment of canned goods, flour, grain, feed, cigars, tobacco, confectionery, fruit and vegetables in season, tea and coffee a specialty."¹

Hills' grocery was frequently mentioned in Hamilton Annual Town Reports as a source of town supplies. A Hamilton resident, he was a member of the fire department.

In 1894, Hills sold his business to Lester E. Libby, who had come to town, in 1880, from Maine. He expanded the store's offerings, adding newspapers and Columbia bicycles.¹ (see *picture, pg. 6*) Cycling had become an important means of transportation, and a popular form of recreation.

Libby also was the Hamilton Postmaster for ten years, the station agent at the depot for eighteen years, and also very involved in real estate and insurance.^{5, 45}

In 1889, Libby was credited with planning and issuing the country's first pocket timetable. It was two inches by two inches, in booklet form of about eight pages. There was advertising.⁵

A 1900 newspaper article about Libby stated he "did not find the grocery business particularly to his liking and gradually withdrew from it and took up the real estate busi-

ness."⁴⁵ A business in which he became very successful,

In 1896, Libby sold his grocery stock to Charles R. Holmes of Ipswich, who ran the business, in the left side of the building (see *picture, pg. 6*). Libby operated his real estate and insurance business on the right side, thus creating, for the first time, two stores on the street level.

Holmes' sign read "Electric Repairs, Cigars, B-L Plug Tobacco, American Express Agency. Holmes' store had a lunchroom, offering "ice cream and soda, teas and coffees." He also took over the bike business Libby had, in a store behind Libby's store and facing onto Liberty Street. However, Holmes was the local agent for Andra Wheel, instead of Columbia bikes.^{1, 45, 46} He also supplied speaking tubes, an early form of communication between building rooms.²

By 1897, depot square had become a very active shopping area. That year, the selectmen had the constable post the warrant for the annual town meeting not only at the meetinghouse and Frank C. Norton's store, but also, for the first time, at Libby's store.³⁸

Around 1905, Charles Holmes sold his business to Robert S. Gwinn of Essex, who just three years later, 1908, sold the business to George F. Pendexter. The business, at that time, had diminished to primarily selling newspapers.¹

Pendexter, who moved to Hamilton in 1907, had been the manager of Brown's Pharmacy in the Appleton block (*aka brick block*) on the other side of Main Street.³⁹ He ran his shop until he died in 1921. Earlier that year, the Hamilton Fire Department elected Pendexter their Chief Engineer (*chief*).³⁹

About 1914, the post office, needing more space, moved across the street to where the library had been in the brick block.¹ (*Now the Black Cow building.*) Douglas Knowlton became the Postmaster.⁵⁷

In 1917, Libby bought the property from Marion P. Dodge of Wenham, who had inherited it from her husband, Emerson P. Dodge. Thomas P. Pingree had sold the property to Dodge, in 1870.²⁵

Three years later, 1920, Libby sold the property to Edmund J. M. Scahill of Ipswich.²⁴ Scahill did not open a business in the building: he acted only as a landlord of what became known as the Scahill block.³⁴

About 1914, the post office, needing more space, moved across the street to where the library had been in the brick block.¹ Douglas Knowlton became the Postmaster.⁵⁷

Scahill's Hamilton investment did not go well. In 1925, he went bankrupt. At an auction, the Welch & Moynihan Co. of Salem bought the property.²²

In 1926, J. Norman Welch of Salem, a partner of Welch & Moynihan Co., opened the Hamilton Hardware store (see picture, pg. 6). After WW2, in 1946, Welch bought the property from the Welch & Moynihan Co.⁹

From the beginning, Ernest Stone of Ipswich ran the business, an old-fashion, hardware emporium. According to "Ernie," it was to have been a temporary job, but he stayed on until the store closed in 1974¹² ... a total of 48 years.

The hardware store remained empty for about a year (see picture, pg. 6), when in 1975, the heirs of Norman Welch sold the property to Roger L. Talbot of Hingham, owner of Talbots, Inc.^{17,18} The company renovated the building and converted it to a women's apparel store (see picture, pg. 6) and added parking places on the railroad side.¹³

The architect for the Talbot building took special care to restore the clock that was on the former hardware store, saying it was "a focal point in depot square."¹³

When Norman Welch acquired the building, it did not have a clock, nor was there a clock on the railroad station. A 1948 photo of the building is the first to show a clock. (see picture, pg. 6) Thus, Welch likely installed the clock on what was the Hamilton Hardware store.



1958 - Hamilton Diner opened next to the hardware store, in 1932. Behind the store was a Jenny gas station. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

2nd floor

The first mention of a business on the second floor of the original Dodge building was in the Salem Gazette, Sep. 10, 1879: "George G. Young, with a reputation of a skillful artist, has leased rooms over the Central Grocery and will shave his customers in the most expeditious and approved style."¹

In 1923, there were two new tenants on the second floor.

The American Legion's Augustus P. Gardner Post No. 194 took a ten-year lease for two rooms on the second floor.²¹ The Legion stayed for more than twenty years, not leaving until 1947, when it moved to the former Adelaide Walsh Schoolhouse, on School Street.³³

Also in 1923, the Hamilton police department leased a second-floor room.³⁴ At the time, Arthur Southwick was Chief of Police, and there were six other officers. Nine years later, in 1932, the police department returned to town hall.³⁵

However, in 1941, the Welfare Dept. needed a town hall office. The Police Station was moved to the annex to the Conway drug store building (now Connolly's drug store). In 1947, the police stationed was moved across Main Street to two rooms on the second floor of the Hamilton Hardware store building, the former location of the American legion.⁵⁴

Also that year, the town purchased (\$2,250), its first police car; previously, officers used their own vehicles while on patrol. The new Ford Police Special, designated "car 45," also served as an ambulance.³³ Hamilton connected, on a low band frequency, with the Beverly Police⁵⁴ The car was parked in front of the hardware store.



1958 - Stephen Kinsella ran the diner until 1958. It was sold and moved to Middleton. Photo, Leigh Keyser

A Hamilton officer patrolled, on foot, the Depot Square district. An emergency requiring police assistance was phoned to the telephone switchboard on Railroad Avenue. To alert the officer on duty, an operator would flip a switch to send a signal to a buzzer and a blue light on a pole at the front of the train station.⁵⁴ (*No, the message was not, "Car 45 where are you?"*)

The police stayed at the depot until 1958, when a new police and fire station was built on Bay Road.³⁷

However, this almost was not the last presence of the police in depot square. At the 1993 Hamilton Annual Town meeting, there was a warrant article, "To see what action the town will take in providing a suitable lockup, the same to be situated near the Wenham and Hamilton R. R. Station and appropriate a sum of money for the same. by L. E. Libby and others.

Hamilton Diner

A 1916 map, issued by Sanborn Fire Insurance, shows there was a restaurant on the east side of Pendexter's store. However, there are no mentions of it in town records.⁴⁷

On the same site, Ralph W. Armstrong of Hamilton erected a diner in 1932. Subsequent owners included: Lewis P. Foote of Wenham (1936-1940); Foote and Harold S. Higgins of Wenham (1942-1950).⁵⁰ The train-car-shaped eatery (*see pictures, pg. 8*) was a favorite for many people. The food was plain, but not expensive.

Ed Haraden recalls, from when he was a teenager and working at the People's Square Shell Station, up the street going to the diner. When the station closed in the evening, Merrill

Cummings, the owner, would give him twenty-five cents, enough for Ed to buy, at the diner, two hot dogs and a Pepsi.⁵⁴

About 1951, Stephen D. Kinsella purchased the diner. He sold it in 1958 and it was moved to Middleton, on Rte. 114, behind Richardson's dairy.⁵⁰

Next, Kinsella opened a restaurant at 2 Main St. (*now 2 Bay Rd., The Salem Five Bank.*) He sold this business, in 1960, and bought the 17th Century House in Essex and opened the Hearthside Restaurant.⁷

Gas station

In 1938, Welch & Moynihan sold a portion of its Hamilton property to Jenney Manufacturing Co. of Boston.³⁰ On the lot (*4,246 sq. ft.*) behind the Hamilton Hardware store building, Jenny built a gasoline station.

Jenney designed the station, as it did with many of its stations, to blend into the area's rural landscape. The building had a Federal cottage appearance, with a peaked roof, cupola, dormers and windows trimmed with shutters. Facing the street was an understated service bay. Two pumps were at the front.

John H. Ostrom, who lived on Union Street, owned and operated the station for many years.⁵⁴ (*Jenney owned the land.*) Ostrom, who was very active in Hamilton committees related to veterans affairs, was a veteran of WW1. He served with the Army Air Corps.⁵⁴

After WW2, in 1947, Ostrom sold the building to Albert W. Dodge. A new Jenney station was built on the site.⁴⁴

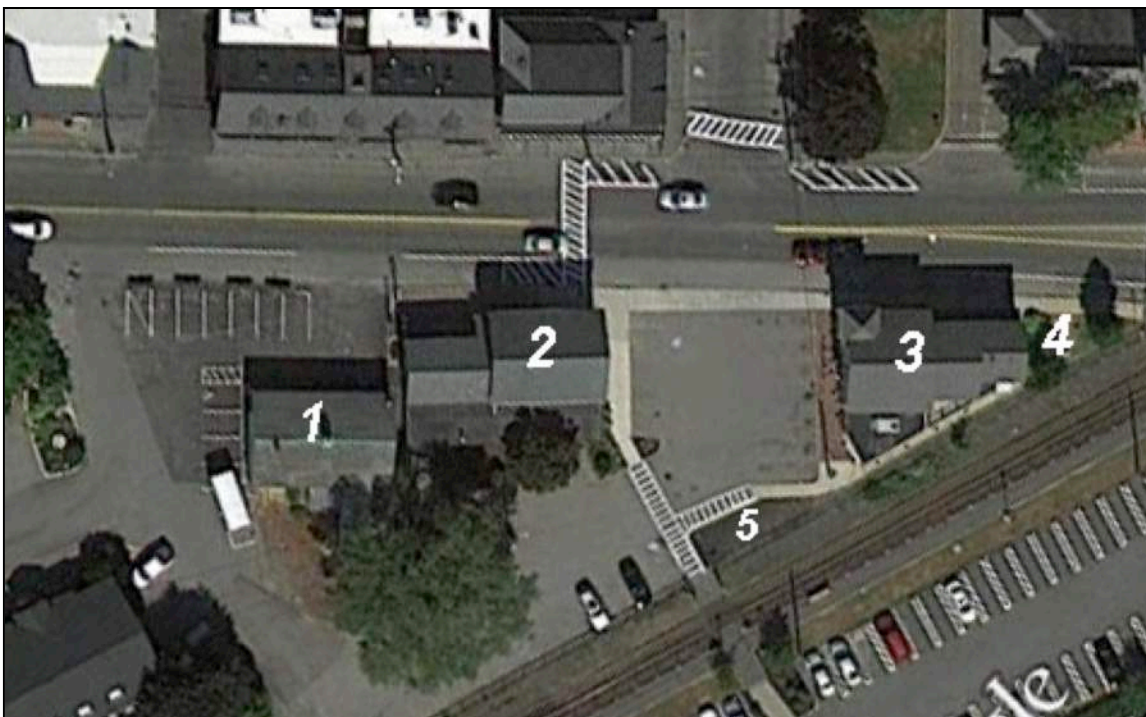
Dodge, who had a tree service business, recently had purchased the property in Wenham adjacent to the gas station. He had the



2015 - T. M. Landscaping building was remodeled in 2015 ??
Photo, J. Hauck



2013 - Former Jenney station became a store on Main Street in Wenham. Bay window at left is where service garage had been.
Photo, J. Hauck



2015 - Depot Square buildings on Bay Road: 1) #17, T & M Landscaping; 2) #31, Talbot's; 3) #45, Community Package Store; 4) Patio; and 5) Planting area. Photo, Google Maps

building moved to the front of his property. Later, it was moved back from Main Street.⁴⁴

In 1982, Donald Costin, who then owned the Wenham property, had the old Jenney station building moved back out to Main Street and converted it into a small, two-floor shop (*see picture below*). The front bay window is where the station's service bay had been.⁴⁴

Following John Ostrom as owner of the Jenny station was Eleutherios Papamechail of Salem. Pappy, as he was known to many, had served in WW2 in the Army Medical Corps.

In 1965, the Town Line Jenney station became a Citgo station, when Jenney became part of Citgo Petroleum.⁵⁴

The land and building became one property in 1980, when the Jenney Oil Co. sold the land to Pappy Papamechail and his wife, Ruth.³²

Four years later, Michael Holland, who had worked at Pappy's station for many years, purchased the property. About that time, the gasoline tanks were removed. Mike's Auto Repair³¹ focused on repairing cars, Volvos in particular.⁵⁴

In 2008, Mike Holland began selling used cars, which he parked on the property. In 2012, Town officials notified Holland he was violating his business license that allowed him

only to sell used vehicles, as long as they were not stored on the property.⁶⁰

Unable to get the town to modify his license, Holland sold the property, in 2013, to T. M. Landscaping (*see picture, pg. 9*). Tom Moulton of Hamilton began his business in 1993.²⁹

Moulton remodeled the building in 2015. Adding second floor.

Today, 2015

Depot Square is now part of a large business area that includes businesses on the north end of Main Street in Wenham, extending into Hamilton on Bay Road up to the Asbury Street intersection, and also on Railroad Avenue, Willow Street and Walnut Street, in Hamilton.

The depot consists of four properties, including (*see picture above*): the Hamilton Package Store (4,246 sq. ft.), Talbot's (7,554 sq. ft.), T. M. Landscaping (8,063 sq. ft.), and the parking lot (10,322 sq. ft.) owned by the Town of Hamilton.⁴³

The Hamilton-Wenham train platforms are on the east side of the railroad tracks.

Hamilton/Wenham is a station on the Newburyport Branch of the MBTA Commuter Newburyport/ Rockport Line. All commuter parking is on the east side of the tracks. In 1998, commuters began to pay, \$2/day, to

park their vehicles.⁵⁷ Train conductors collect fares.

In 2015, from Boston to Hamilton-Wenham, on weekdays, there are 8 trains leaving between 1:20 p.m. and 11:45 p.m. From Hamilton-Wenham to Boston there are 7 trains leaving from 6:49 a.m. to 9:19 p.m.

Round trip riders were about 240, in 2012, the 8th highest among the line's 18 stations.⁵⁶

Jack Hauck, 2015

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