

# Peleg Chandler

By C. TALBOT ROGERS

**T**HIS is the story of a "Journey to Halifax"—a journey which covers but a relatively few miles, and only a few days in the early life of a young man from Maine; a young man of courage and ambition, who in spite of disappointment and frustration achieved better than average success in his chosen profession, and whose son in turn went even further to become nationally known in that same profession.

The journey began from the steps of the old Bell Tavern, in the then-busy and thriving town of New Gloucester. The date was Monday, November 30, A.D. 1790, at one of the clock; and in a handwritten, carefully sewn booklet, well preserved, the story of that trip is easily and simply told. This booklet, now in the files of the Historical Society of New Gloucester, is done in the characteristic penmanship of the day, with the old-fashioned "s" in the middle of words, and the front and back covers embellished with well-formed flourishes. The front cover states simply: "Peleg Chandler's Journal from New Gloucester to Hallifax," while on the back cover the writer identifies himself as follows: "Peleg Chandler Jr is my name. New Gloucester is my Native Place. Written at Hallifax the 12th day of February, 1791, A.D."

It was not an extremely hazardous trip, even in that day. The threat from hostile Indians had passed; possible bounty was not worth the risk to highwaymen; and surely young Chandler was safe from those present-day threats to life, limb, and property, drivers who pass on the right, cut in from the left, and weave

from lane to lane, driving on a mixture of gasoline and alcohol—from whom may the good Lord preserve us all! Even so, it was by no means a pleasure jaunt, and few of us would willingly attempt it today under the same conditions and circumstances. For a boy barely beginning his seventeenth year, it was a major undertaking.

Before starting with him on this journey, let us look for a moment at the background of this lad. His father, Peleg Chandler, Sr., born in 1735, had married Sarah Winslow of North Yarmouth, in 1762; and the journey which that young couple undertook deserves mention. According to the story, their wedding trip from North Yarmouth to New Gloucester was made in an oxcart, the first two-wheeled vehicle that had ever been over the road. Since the wedding was on December 9, it is surmised that it must have been a very open winter indeed, unless the trip was postponed until later in the spring; and at any time at all it must have been a rough bumpy journey over a road nothing at all like Interstate 95, or even old-fashioned U. S. 1.

Peleg Chandler, Sr., is described as an "honest citizen, a blacksmith by trade, and a good one"; and evidently his skills were not limited to the smithy. One of the founders of the "Orthodox" First Parish Church, he served as Town Warden; during the Revolution he was one of a committee to fix prices, for many years he was a member of the Committee of Safety, and in 1784 he was Representative to the General Court of Massachusetts.

About 1773 he built the Bell Tavern,

which today houses the United States Post Office, and here as host to jurors and witnesses in a busy shire town he was well known throughout the county, and indeed through all of Massachusetts, since many of the family, including his father, Philip, had remained in and around Duxbury, where the first Chandler had settled.

In that same year, 1773, young Peleg, Jr., was born; so that when in 1790 he began this journey to Halifax he had passed his seventeenth birthday by a scant three months. Of course, at seventeen many a lad had left home for college; but Peleg, Jr., was not going forth as a student. He was, at that tender age, about to become a schoolmaster, to help earn his way through college.

Halifax is a long, long way from Cumberland County, Maine—even today in a modern car over modern highways—and one wonders why the people of Nova Scotia had to come all the way to New Gloucester to find a schoolmaster. Of course, by ship from Portland to Halifax would be an easy trip, but it proved by no means as simple as that. Somehow, as the journey progressed, he seemed to be heading always in the wrong direction—until finally it developed that there was—and still is—another Halifax, in Massachusetts, some thirty miles or so south of Boston.

However, let the lad speak for himself. Let us start with page one of his journal.

November the 30th A.D. 1790 Monday at one of the clock set out to go to Hallifax to keeping school. Went as far as Moses Haskell that night. In the morning Moses and myself set out together. We rode as far as Elwells and stopped and drank a mug of cider. We then put on as far as Hammons in Stout Water [Stroud-water?] and then stopped and bated our horses; then put on for Bradbury's Tavern in Pepperlsborough [now Saco], and got there about dark. Put up our horses and called for our suppers;

and in about half an hour had it. We drank six dishes apiece and eat as much toast as we could. Then went to playing checkers with the landlord, beat him 5 or 6 times and then went to bed.

This was his first night on the road, after staying in the home of his friend Haskell, and so far the journey had not been arduous. In fact the next day was not too bad.

In the morning we got up, paid our reckoning as quick as possible and set out. We arrived at Saucó Bridge a little after sunrise and after long debate with the tollman went over. We rode till about one of the clock . . . stopped and bated our horses and roasted our turkey and eat it with the help of a mug of cyder and after suitable refreshment we set out again. Rode very fast all the afternoon and about dark arrive at Capt. Shannons in Dover near the bridge, put up our horses and called for supper and had it brought to us, consisting of chocolate and biscuit toast. We drank 8 cups apiece and as much toast as possible and after suitable time to settle it, we retired into a warm bed where we prostrated our languid limbs till the ensuing morning.

Service in the tavern was not so good next morning; certainly not up to modern standards set by Howard Johnson or Holiday Inn motel chains.

In the morning about an half an hour betwixt break of day and sunrise got up, went into the kitchen, and sat down over an handfull of coals. We sat awhile but nobody appeared; then to fly round and make as much noise as possible. By and by along comes a negro as black as the D---l and made up a fire big enough to roast an ox. We sat down awhile but no landlord appeared. We asked the negro whether the landlord laid abed till noon commonly. He went and called him and we got away as quick as possible (it being cold enough to freeze one). We rode till about 2 of the clock in the afternoon which brought us to Capt. Sanborns in Hampton. Stopped and bated our horses and set out again about sunset. We got to the Newberry ferry but could not get over till about dark.

And now it was that I had to part with my friend Haskell. Nobody can tell what I felt when I had to leave him at his uncles and seek

for a tavern, not knowing where to find one, and being almost froze standing so long at the ferry awaiting for the D---d ferry man, he being almost intoxicated.

But I got off on the old mare and drove on for dear life. I had gone about a mile when I beheld a sight which excited a great deal of joy to think that I had got home for that night. Went in and got the old mare taken care of. But how do you think that I felt to see it look likely to storm before morning . . . and being so near to Haskell and was not agoing to stay with him.

Very understandably the seventeen-year-old lad was beginning to feel the pangs of homesickness, and no wonder. But as the night wore on, things got worse:

About seven of the clock I thought I would go to bed not having any stomach to eat any supper so I drank half mug of cyder and went to bed. About midnight the storm came on and sure such a storm I never saw. It snowed, rained, hailed all together as hard as ever it did in the world. But that ain't the worse of it. I like to frozed to death for the want of bed-clothes. I got up and put on my clothes but it could not keep me warm. About day or a little before up I got and down I goes and sat down where the fire should be. By and by they began to get up and glad was I, but could not get out doors the wind blew so hard. About 9 of the clock I called for some breakfast and soon had it but could not eat any of it, hardly, feeling so like the Old Boy.

Perhaps it was not food that he needed, so much as the sight of a familiar face, or a friend, for

At ten o'clock I thought I would go and see Haskell, it being so stormy that I could not ride, so I went and dined with him at his uncle's. After dinner I wished him good by and left him in a good harbour, and set out, it being about 2 of the clock. I needed but a little more sail to go as fast as the wind would convey me. However, I rode about ten miles which brought me to Ipswige, went in to the ale house and got some ale and then drove on about a mile and put up just over the bridge.

About 12 of the clock at night it cleared away pleasant and calm which caused me sweet repose. In the morning I arose and set out as

soon as possible, it being Saturday morning and I having about 80 miles to go before I got to Duxborough.

Duxborough was the town now known as Duxbury, not many miles from Plymouth, where Edmond, the first of the Chandler family in this country, had settled in the 1630's. The old family home was now his immediate destination, but with 80 miles to go, young Peleg had at least one more night on the road. And so, leaving "Ipswige,"

I put on as fast as I could and about 2 of the clock arrived at a tavern about 10 miles out of Boston. There I bated myself and horse and then set out for Boston where I arrived about 5 of the clock.

Went to see Greene and he avowed that I should stop with him all night and play checkers, so I consented. We walked all over town together. About dark we went to his lodgings, he ordered a fire built in one of the chambers and it was done, so we went to playing checkers. We had not played so long before along comes Sam with his bottle of wine, so we drank wine and played checkers till about 3 of the clock in the morning. I told them it was almost meeting time and I wished to go to bed.

We slept till about sunrise at which time I got up and told them I must be going. They swore I should not stir till I had drunk half pint of wine so I drank it and left them, got my horse and set out, it being Sunday morning.

The old saying, "the better the day, the better the deed," was never accepted by our Puritan ancestors; and our hero was soon in trouble with the law.

Rode as far as Arnolds in Brantry and called and got mug of cyder. I then put on and met a Warden agoing home from the forenoon meeting. He told me I must not ride there Sunday. I told him I would put up at the tavern just ahead. So I did put, long enough to drink a mug of cyder and then put on and rode along till I came to Hingham meeting house.

Meeting was just done as I got by the meeting house. The people being acold ran as fast as they could and so overtook me. The Warden told me it was against the law to travel Sunday there. I told him I would put up at Cathmores, so he let me go and I did put up long

enough to drink some cyder and then put on again and about sunset arrive at Uncle Perez's.

Uncle Perez must have lived in Duxbury, the ancestral home of the Chandler family. Our hero was now among friends, the worse of the journey over.

Monday I went to Kingstown [Kingston] and stayed till about 9 of the clock. Tuesday then to Duxborough again and Wednesday went to Halifax.

Called to Watermans to enquire for the Committee and the house was chock full people and there I found the committee. We went in to a chamber and agreed with me, which was the 9th day of December.

So I went to Gideon Soule's and kept school in his house one week till the Schoolhouse was fixed, then to Thad Torry and boarded there one week. January the 12th went to Ephraim Tinkham's where I am now this day, which is the 12th day of February.

And so the journey to Halifax was safely completed, after six nights on the road. Today we could leave Bell Tavern at one of the clock and be in Duxbury in time for supper; an easy trip, over modern turnpikes and expressways. No need to be starting at dawn or before or to put up with drowsy landlords who sleep till noon, nor need we fear the wardens, if it happens to be the Sabbath when we make our journey.

This was not by any means young Chandler's only journey from New Gloucester. He must have gone over the same roads again when in 1792 he entered Rhode Island College, now Brown University, as a member of the sophomore class, 1795.

After graduation from college he returned home, anxious to study law, but his mother's wishes, and his father's need for help with the farm-blacksmith shop-tavern enterprises caused him to put aside his ambitions. Peleg, Jr., never gave up, however; and the time came when he was at last free to take up his chosen profession first in New Gloucester then in Bangor. Of these later years his son, Peleg Whitman Chandler, has written:

Coming upon the stage at so late a day (after the birth of 10 children, and well into his forties) he could not of course expect to take the highest position. But he was a man of marked ability, of great wit and humor, fairly read in the law, and an advocate of more than average success. In 1819, before the separation of Maine from Massachusetts, he was appointed a Judge of the Court of Sessions, holding the office for several years after Maine became a State and until his removal to Bangor. He continued in the profession until his death in 1848, at the age of 74.