

The Covered Bridge of Pepperell

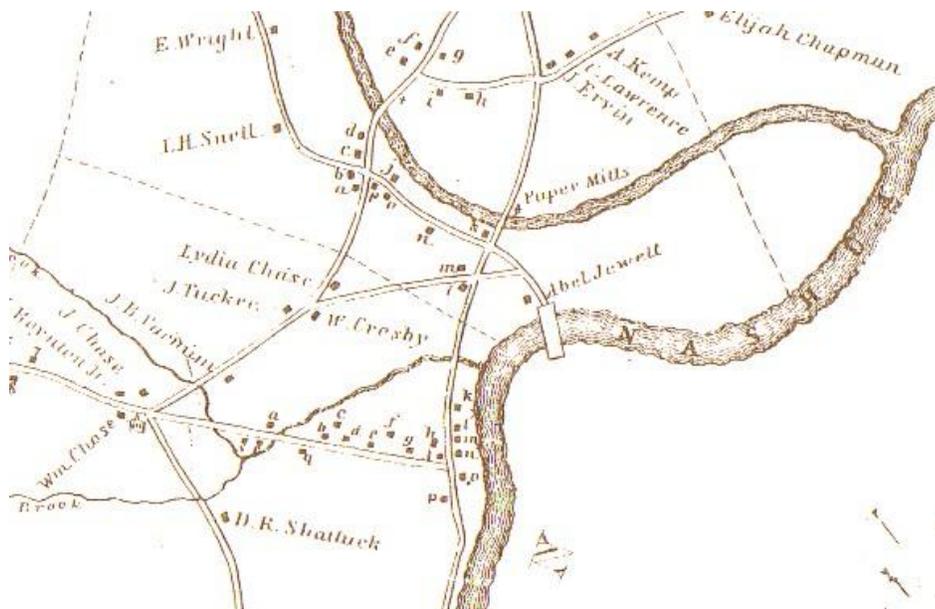
1742 - An uncovered wooden bridge historically referred to as “the cart bridge at Joseph Blood’s Fordway”, links Groton West Parish and Groton. Cost – Unknown

1753 - As Pepperell becomes a district, Groton and Pepperell discuss joint responsibilities to maintain two cart bridges now at the borders of the two towns, with each town taking ownership to maintain their half of the bridge to the middle of the river.

Sept 16 1754 - Agreement is documented stating that Pepperell will maintain the cart bridge at Joseph Blood’s Fordway and Groton will maintain the other cart bridge at Stony wading-place.

1775 - Groton and Hollis Minutemen respond to the call against the British regulars in Lexington and Concord. With their husbands in Lexington, a group of 30-40 women dressed in men’s clothing and lead by Prudence Wright of Pepperell, defend the bridge crossing against British spies.

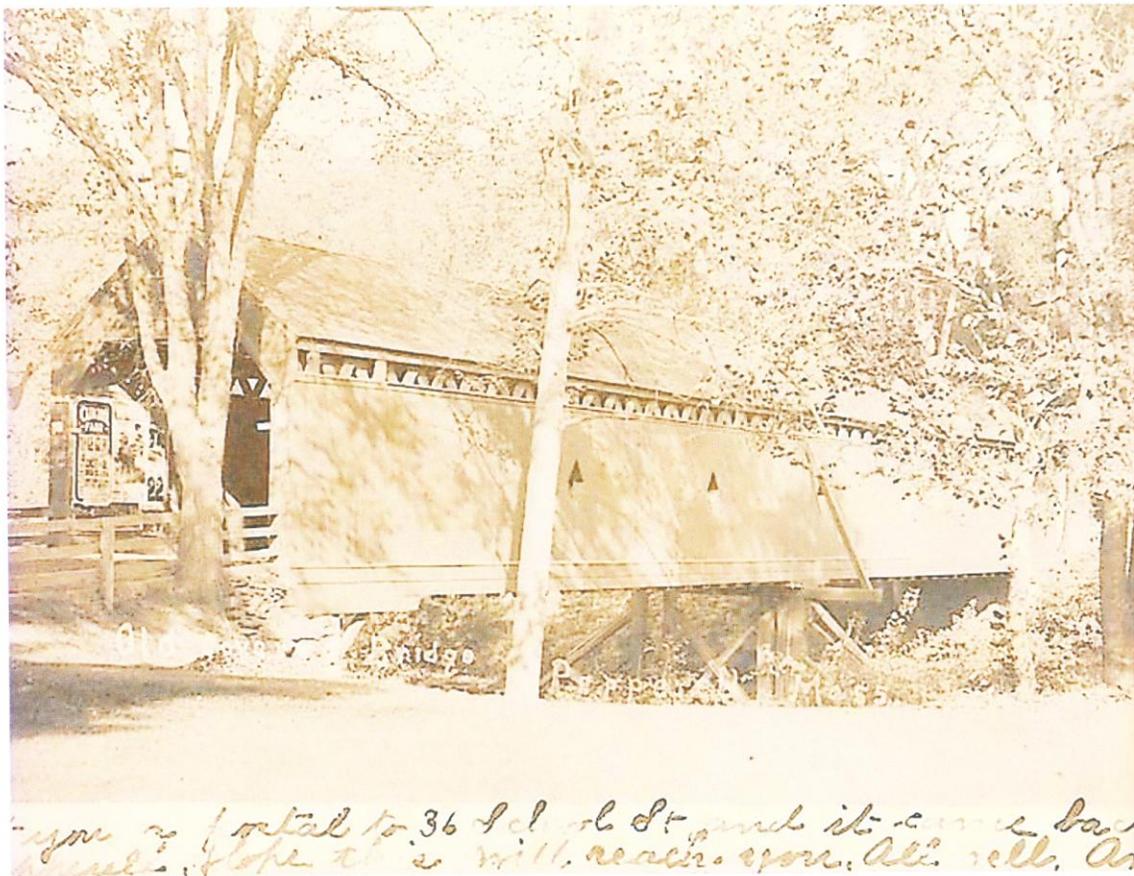
March 3 1818 – Groton town history states that “Days of warm rain and south winds melts a deep snow and causes a flood, which does immense damage to dams, mills and bridges. Fitch’s and Jewett’s bridges carried away.” The bridge is referred to as Jewett’s Bridge at sometime prior to this date.



1844 Bridge Crossing

1847 – The bridge was rebuilt as a 147-foot-long, 10 ton capacity covered lattice truss structure made primarily of chestnut pegs and timbers from other bridges in the area. This bridge represented the boundary between Pepperell and Groton until 1857 and the boundary line was in the middle of

the bridge. The town requested a bridge to be modeled after the covered bridge in Hollis known as the Runnell's Bridge which cost \$2200. Captain Parker was chosen to build the new bridge at a cost of \$1200, but the resulting bridge was considered so inferior to the Hollis bridge that the town of Pepperell demanded a warranty for ten years and paid Parker \$1.00 for each year of the warranty. The Pepperell bridge lasted about 36 years longer than the Runnells Bridge. Cost \$1200.



Bridge Image Estimated 1905

1920 –A 5 foot wide sidewalk is added along the bridge's west side. The same year, its fieldstone footings are replaced with concrete piers. The bridge is moved 12 foot upstream on the northern side and 2 feet downstream on the southern side.

1936 – The bridge survives the historic March Flood with minor damage while the bridge crossing a short distance upstream on Main Street is severely damaged from floodwaters.

1950 – Bridge weight limit is reduced to 4 ton capacity.

July 6 1958 – The decaying covered bridge is inadequate to handle the car and truck traffic generated by Pepperell's post World War II growth and the bridge is closed.



1962 - 1963 – A new covered bridge is built and dedicated on November 4 1963, named the Chester H. Waterous Bridge after the legislator who won funding for it. The 20 ton capacity pratt truss structure is 184 feet long with 105 feet being covered including two 8 foot walkways.
Cost - \$233,000.



March 1998 – An inspection concludes the bridge is in poor condition and is in critical need of paint and coating.

December 1998 – The town is told the rebuild will be part of the next round of projects slated for 2000.

January 2000 – The bridge remains a high priority but daily repairs to the paved surface results in a lowering of the load limit to 6 tons.

November 2000 – The project is assigned to a consulting engineer after Rep. Robert Hargraves and Sen. Steve Panagiotakos become involved. Robert E. Lee, Pepperell Town Engineer, insists again, that the iconic bridge should be an all-timber structure.

June 2001 – The first surveyors arrive.

November 2001 – Structural engineers conclude that the bridge cannot carry modern loads.

June 2002 – MassHighway agrees to rebuild the bridge as a timber covered bridge, using a design devised for another town.

June 2004 – The bridge’s condition is now described as “critical”.

February 2005 – The town is directed to obtain easements on abutting land from the Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife. Bridge reconstruction is to start in the summer of 2006 and end in spring 2008. Cost is estimated at \$2.3 million.

June 2005 – Bidding is delayed awaiting DEP and the Army Corps of Engineers river work permits.

February 2006 – The state confirms that cutbacks will not impact the project. New cost estimate is \$3.5 million.

April 2006 – A third engineer is needed to review the final bid documents because of the unique nature of the work and bidding will be delayed until May. New cost estimate is \$5.5 million.

May 2006 – Challenges are faced regarding the movement of high-tension electrical wires that cross the project site. Construction bids will still go out by July.

November 2007 – State awards \$7.97 million contract.

April 2008 – The Chester Waterous Bridge is closed to traffic. Scheduled completion is 2010.

May 2008 – Overhead power lines are started.

July 2008 – The demolition of the bridge begins.



November 2008 – Salvaged wood from the Chester Waterous Bridge is used for fundraising and to promote the history of the covered bridges.

August 2008 – Clams are found and moved up river. The utility bridge opens and the public can cross safely and view the project. Main bridge trusses are removed.

September 2008 – Pier demolition started

October 2008 –South pier pilings are driven.

February 2009 – Concrete is poured into the new piers.

March 2009 – Stone fascia is applied to the piers.

Jun 2009 – Approach roadway steel is installed.

October 2009 – A monument is finished after mounting the old brass plaque from the Chester Waterous Bridge onto granite through donations from Pepperell businesses.

November 2009 – The first bridge pieces arrive. The crane is assembled on the temporary platform.

December 2009 – The first of the 96 foot beams arrive. Cross beams are put in place and the first long road deck beam is placed.

January 2010 – The Pepperell Board of Selectman invite the public to help name the new covered bridge.

Timeline courtesy: Dave Pease and The Pepperell Historical Society
Photos courtesy: Chet Babineau, David Pease, The Pepperell Historical Society, The Pepperell Reader