

# 56 Bath-Haverhill Covered Bridge:

North Court Street, Woodsville, New Hampshire

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Every New England covered bridge has a story ... creation, survival, or destruction and resurrection. However, the story of the Bath-Haverhill Covered Bridge is all about longevity. According to official documents on file with the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, this 1829-built bridge is the oldest covered bridge in New Hampshire, as well as the first and only bridge to be constructed at its location on New Hampshire Route 135.

Also known as the Woodsville Covered Bridge, spanning the Ammonoosuc River, the bridge is thought to be the earliest existing example of the Town lattice truss bridge, a form of truss bridge patented by Architect Ithiel Town in 1820 and 1835. The bridge is 256.3' long and its roadway is 14'2" with a maximum vertical clearance of 10'11". A pedestrian sidewalk was added in 1920 on the northern side of the bridge.

The first formal steps to construction began at the 1827 March town meeting in Bath when voters appointed a committee to begin holding discussions with Haverhill Select Board to determine a suitable site. In September of 1828 the Town of Bath set aside \$300 to be used to purchase stone and timber for the bridge. By the end of 1829 the bridge was complete, with final construction costs estimated at \$2,400, and both towns sharing the costs equally.

Updates and repairs over the years were necessary due to age, flooding, and the industrialization of the United States. The historic flood of November 1927, which devastated towns and bridges throughout New Hampshire and Vermont, caused significant damage to the bridge. That day, a large log floating down the river crashed into the bridge and destroyed several lattice junctions. Even though some of the bridge's structural components were compromised, it held and survived the flooding. New lattice planks were used to repair the damage, and these repairs can be observed today.

With the establishment of the modern state highway network in the 1920s, the Bath-Haverhill Covered Bridge was given the designation of New Hampshire Route 135, even though the bridge was still owned by the Towns of Bath and Haverhill. Laminated arches were added to the structure to meet increased load requirements in 1920-1921. Bridge repairs in 1973 cost the Towns of Bath and Haverhill and the State of New Hampshire \$38,710, with an additional \$8,000 spent in 1981 to repair damage caused by ice. An arsonist attempted, unsuccessfully, to burn the bridge down on the night of September 11, 1983, prompting a sprinkler system to be installed in later years. The bridge continued to carry traffic on Route 135 until it was by-passed in 1999 and closed to all vehicular traffic.

In June 2002, the Select Boards from the Towns of Bath and Haverhill voted to restore the bridge to retain the laminated arches installed in the 1920's and raise the bridge 2' to protect it against flood damage. The bridge underwent a major \$1.3 million restoration, and was rededicated following the completion of the renovation in 2008. It is currently open to pedestrian traffic only.

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