

Building "Bridges With Roofs"

Early residents built crude bridges to cross the many area rivers and streams in the area. These bridges were often not much more than a pair of logs spanning the banks, covered with rough-hewn planks. It was well expected that the bridges would rot in time and often would be swept away after heavy rains. These bridges met the needs of those who lived on isolated farms, but were unsatisfactory when it came to the more heavily traveled town roads.

In 1806, reality hit home. A major flood hit the Valley and damaged or destroyed most bridges in the area. Town officials, wanting to avoid the expense of replacing bridges, determined that the covered bridge was an attractive option. The roof cover and solid walls served two purposes. The primary purpose was to keep horses and other animals from seeing the river below and becoming spooked.

The covered bridge is not original to Vermont, or even New England. The first covered bridge—a three-arch structure—was built in Philadelphia in 1804. Though unlike the Pennsylvania bridge, the bridges remaining in the Valley are typical of those found throughout New England.

The Valley was also home to a unique "half-covered bridge." The bridge once crossed the Mad River south of the present Kingsbury iron bridge on route 100. One half of the bridge, crossing the main part of the stream was covered, but a whole section of the bridge was left without a roof. The bridge was notorious for its sharp turns at each end. The road was re-aligned when the new iron bridge was erected.

Three of the original Mad River Valley covered bridges still remain and are well preserved. The Pine Brook Bridge on North Road, the Village (Great Eddy) Bridge in Waitsfield and the Lincoln Gap Bridge in Warren remain, while others fell victim to age or flooding.

PINE BROOK BRIDGE

Other names: Wilder

Owner: Town of Waitsfield

Crosses: Pine Brook

Traffic load: Up to 5 tons

Built: 1872

Builder: Unknown

Design: Kingpost

Dimensions: 48 feet long, 14 feet wide, 9 feet 3 inches high at truss, 12 feet high at center



The bridge is one of two kingpost bridges remaining in the state. The kingpost (with a spiral crack that developed well after construction) is now secured with a metal clamp.

By the 1970s, the bridge was in a sad state, with deck supports rotting and the deck itself sagging. Milton Graton and Son, a New Hampshire based engineering firm specializing in covered bridges, was hired to restore the bridge in 1976. In order to retain the bridge's historic integrity (and to qualify for a \$7000 historic preservation grant) and to minimize visual impact, Graton laid two parallel steel beams (out of sight) about one inch below the wooden trusses. These beams, which spanned the river between the support piers on each side, would carry the weight of the bridge and its load should the bridge become overloaded.

Visit the Village Bridge on Bridge Street in Waitsfield and the Lincoln Gap Bridge in Warren.

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