

Crossing the Baker River

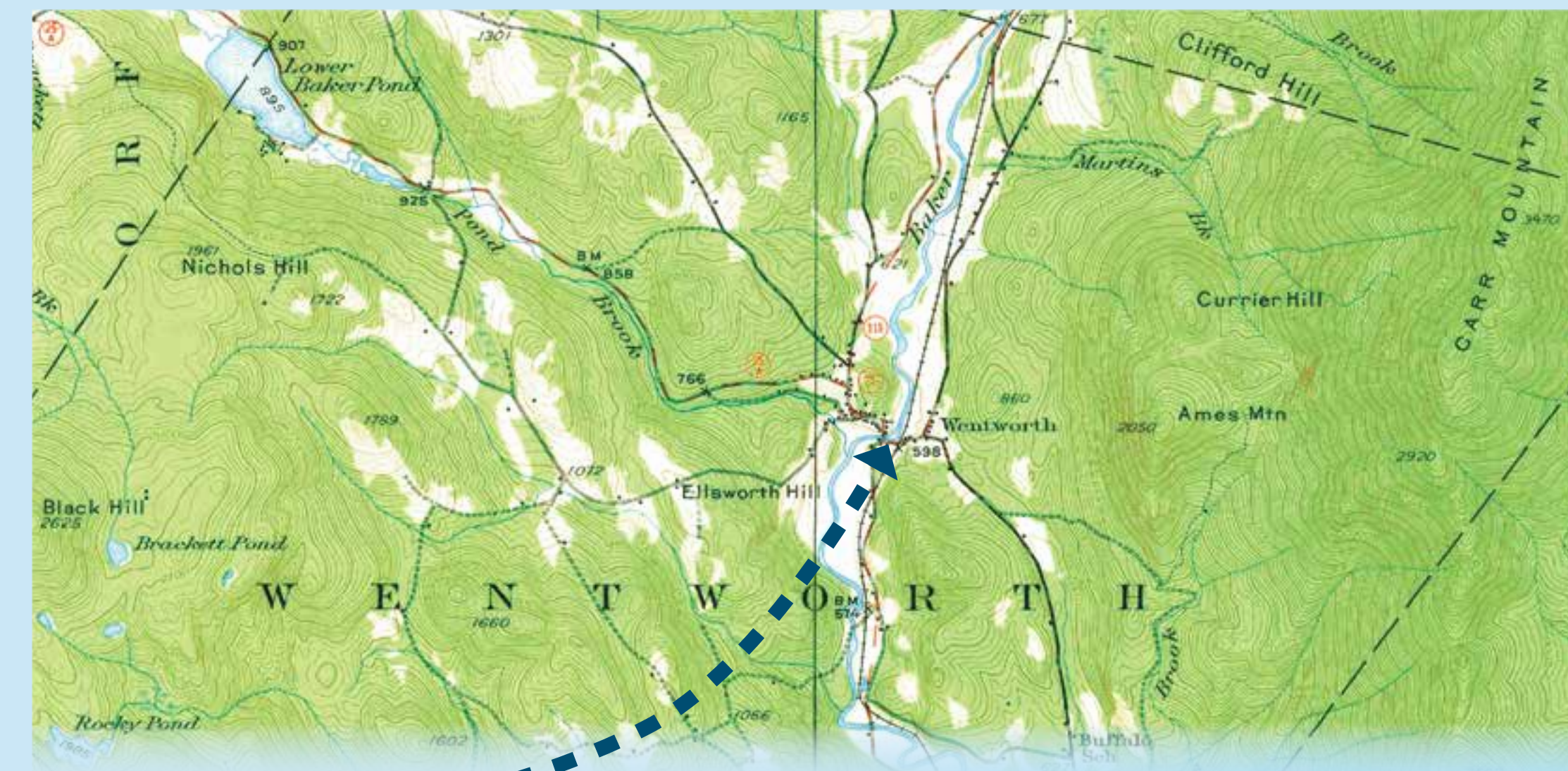
The **Baker River** runs from Mount Moosilauke in Benton to the Pemigewasset River in Plymouth, a course of over 36 miles. The river valley has served as an important corridor for successive modes of transit beginning with early paths and roads, followed by stagecoach routes, then the Boston, Concord, and Montreal Railroads, and most recently Moosilauke Road/State Route 25.

Important routes through the Baker River Valley have always crossed the river in this area. The first bridge across the river was built in the late 18th century. Little is known about it except its name, Great Bridge or Aikens Bridge. Frequent washouts prompted the town to move the crossing upstream in the 1810s to just above the Falls. From that time, this crossing has been the only link between the two sides of the village.

In 1918 the crossing became part of the 35.1-mile long Moosilauke Road (later NH Route 25) which ran between Plymouth and Haverhill. The road was part of a statewide effort to increase automobile usage and attract visitors to New Hampshire for recreation. In 1937 the state rerouted the highway downstream, bypassing the village center.

Since that change, the bridge here has carried only local traffic. In 1987 deteriorating conditions forced its closure to vehicular traffic and then in 2010 even to pedestrian traffic. In 2016 the bridge was removed and replaced by a pedestrian-only bridge.

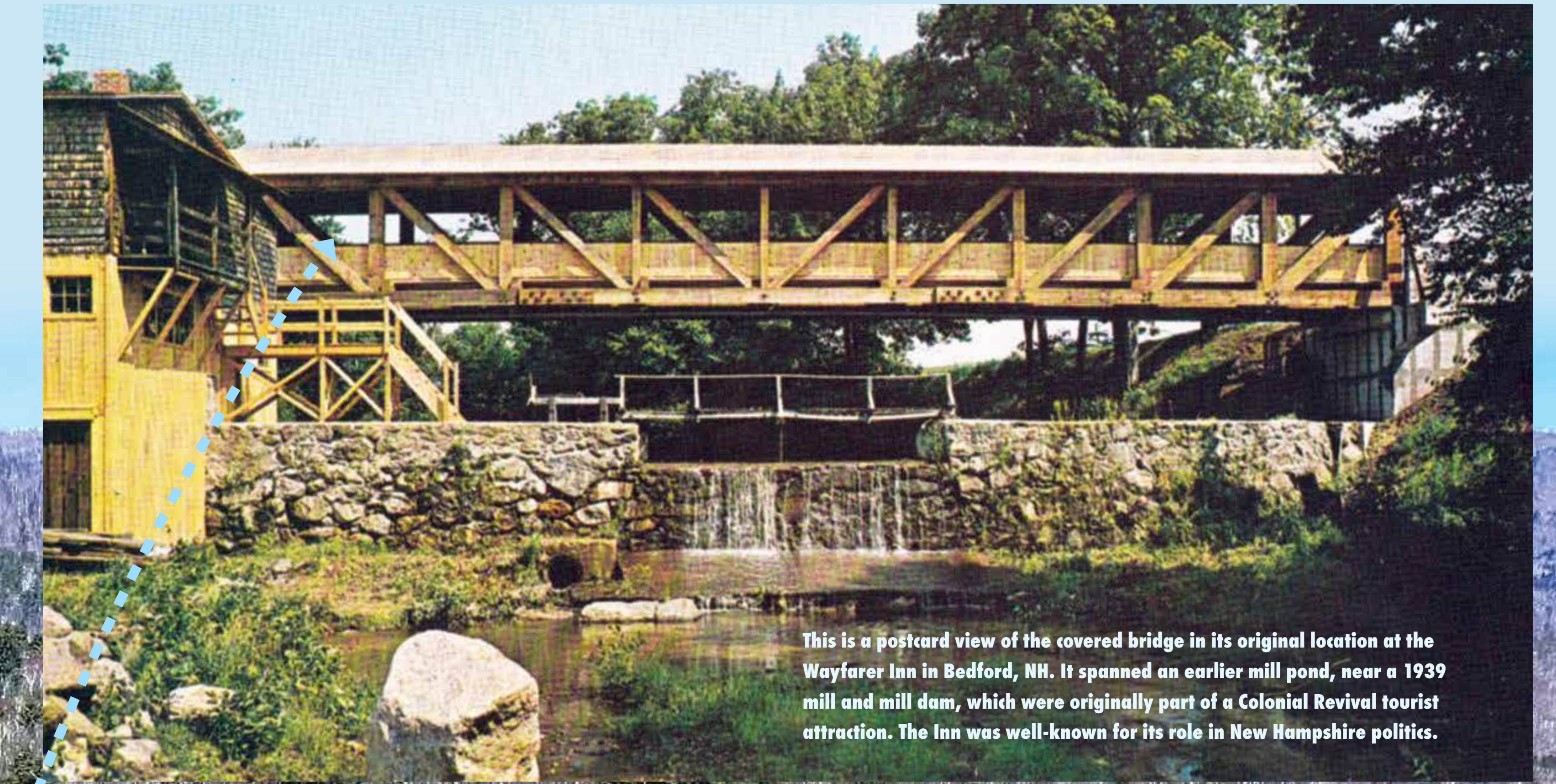
THREE BRIDGES IN WENTWORTH VILLAGE



Baker River Valley in Wentworth shown on the 1928 USGS map.

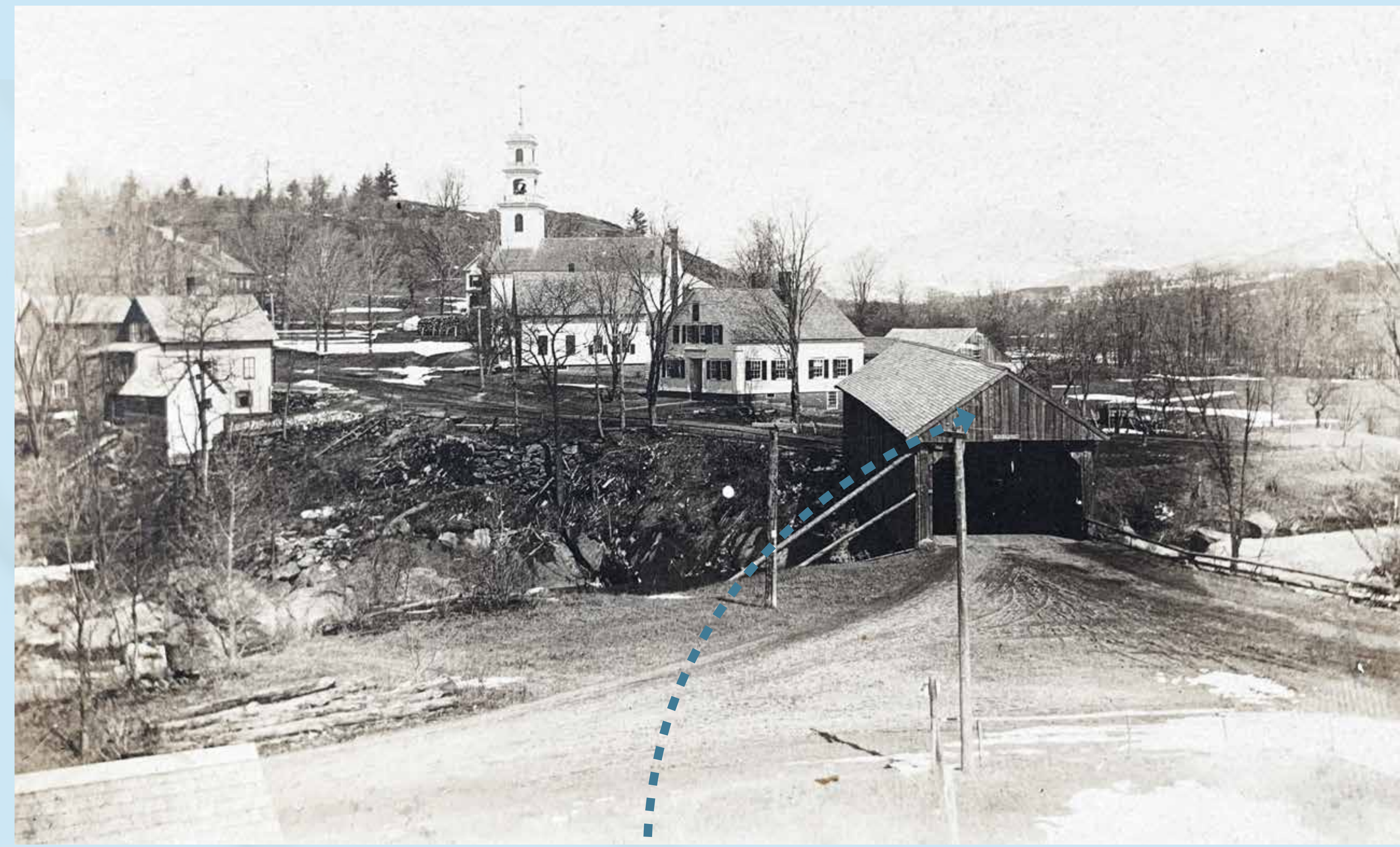
FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE (2016-Present)

In 2016 the Friends of the Wentworth Parks and Recreation rescued a **1962 wooden covered bridge** slated for demolition. Relocated to Wentworth Village and renamed the Friendship Bridge, it maintains a pedestrian connection between the two sides of the village. Originally located in Bedford, NH, the bridge connected the Wayfarer Inn and Convention Center, situated on opposite sides of a mill pond. It is a variation of a **Pratt truss** bridge. Typically, a Pratt truss bridge has timber vertical posts and diagonal metal rods inclined towards the ends of the bridge. This bridge has timber tie rods.



This is a postcard view of the covered bridge in its original location at the Wayfarer Inn in Bedford, NH. It spanned an earlier mill pond, near a 1939 mill and mill dam, which were originally part of a Colonial Revival tourist attraction. The Inn was well-known for its role in New Hampshire politics.

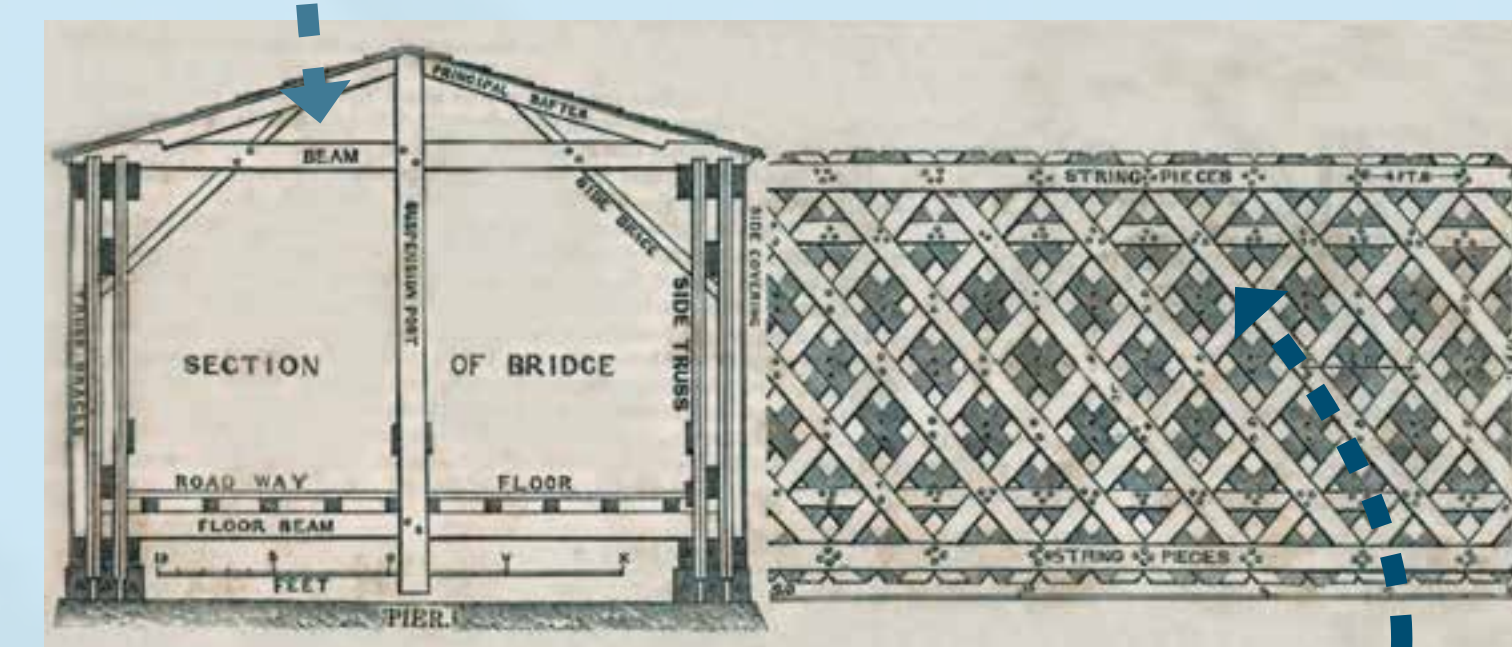
ITHIEL TOWN THRU-TRUSS BRIDGE (1866-1909)



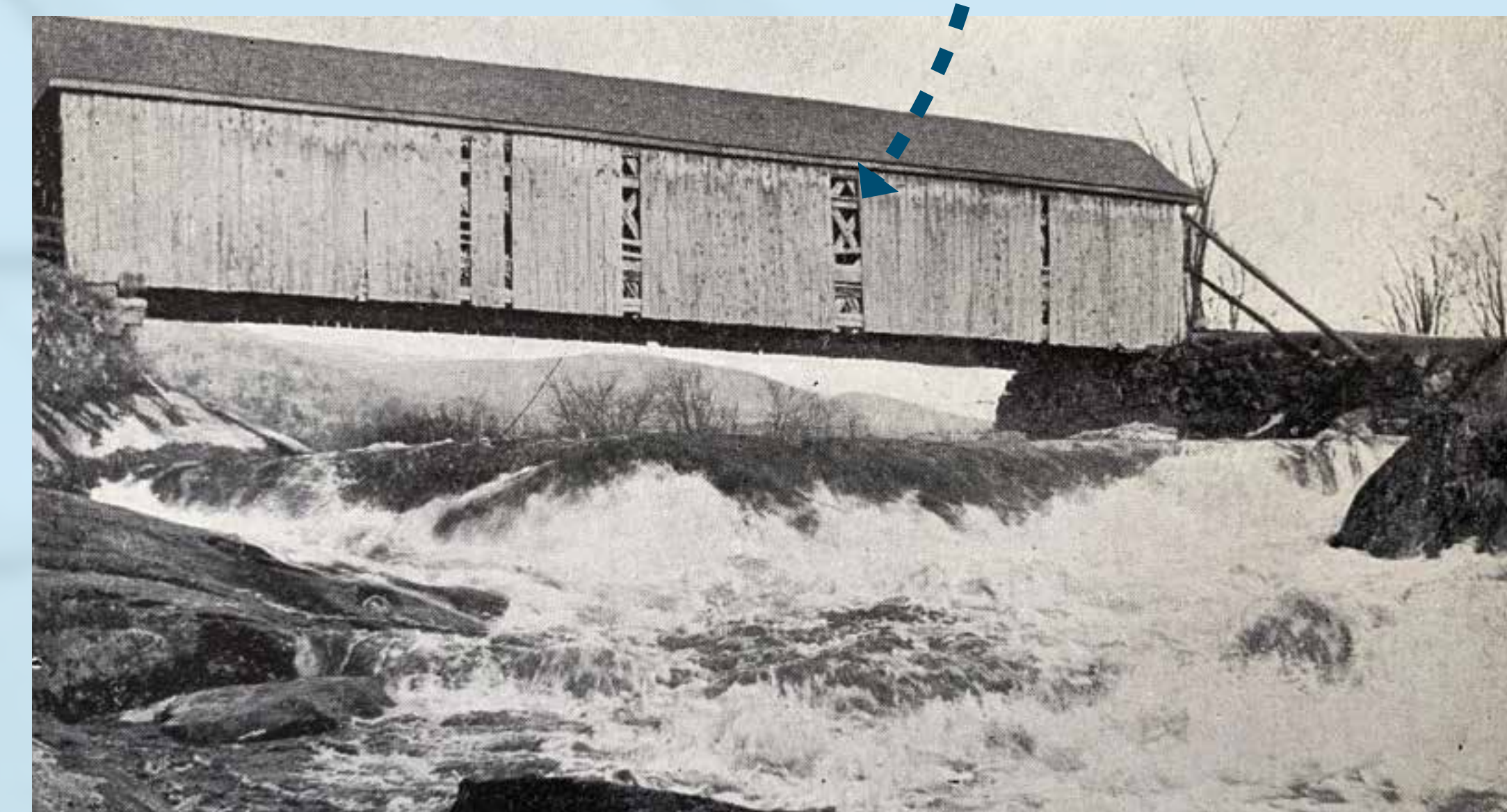
Ithiel Town Thru-Truss Covered Bridge. Courtesy of Webster Library

In 1866 the Town of Wentworth constructed a covered bridge in the village, just upstream from the Falls. It replaced an earlier bridge of unknown design and cost \$1,000 to build. The bridge was one of two new **Ithiel Town lattice truss covered bridges** erected in town in the mid-1860s.

Ithiel Town (1784-1844) was a Connecticut architect and civil engineer who patented truss bridge designs in 1820 and 1835. He designed the first true truss. It became very popular because it could be easily assembled with a small amount of wood, bolts, and trenails (wooden pins) in just an afternoon by persons with limited carpentry skills.



Drawing from *A Description of Ithiel Town's Improvement in the Principle, Construction, and Practical Execution of Bridges, For Roads, Railroads, and Aqueducts*, published in 1839, showing a bridge section and lattice trusses.



Ithiel Town Thru-Truss Covered Bridge. Courtesy of Wentworth Historical Society

WARREN THRU-TRUSS BRIDGE (1909-2016)



The men constructing the new steel bridge taking a moment to pose for this photo. Courtesy of Wentworth Historical Society

In 1909 the town replaced the covered bridge with a single-span, riveted steel, **Warren thru-truss bridge**. This bridge type became popular in the early twentieth century due to its low cost to build and its sturdy design, derived from the built-up lattice-bar vertical and diagonal members. The renowned New Hampshire bridge engineer John William Storrs (1858-1942) designed it. The nationally known American Bridge Company, which specialized in steel spans, manufactured this bridge and the United Construction Company erected it.



Look closely and you will see that there's a horse and buggy crossing the steel bridge, a Warren thru-truss built in 1909. Courtesy of Wentworth Historical Society

A section of the bridge railing was restored and has been installed as a fence next to this sign. A matching grant from the Northern Border Regional Commission made this possible.

Wentworth Village

The village was established here because of its favorable location near the confluence of the Baker and Poor rivers and the Coos Road. By the 1770s the Coos Road had been laid out to provide a land route between Concord on the Merrimack River and Haverhill on the Connecticut River. Taverns and inns developed in Wentworth offering lodging, food, and other services to those traveling along the route. The rivers provided waterpower for industry, particularly gristmills and up to nine sawmills. A **disastrous flood in 1856** swept away not only many of the mills, but also fifteen houses, shops, and a large section of riverbank exposing ledge. The village had three major fires in 1828, 1890, and 1921 which destroyed many buildings. Residents quickly rebuilt creating the picturesque village we see today.

The Town Common

In 1812 the town redesigned the village center to create a town common in an unsuccessful effort to become the county seat. The hope was that new county buildings would be located around it, bringing prestige and revenue to the village. The original burying ground, meetinghouse, and schoolhouse were removed to create the necessary open space. Remains from the burying ground were relocated to a newly established cemetery outside the village center and the buildings were moved to nearby locations. The land was leveled and seeded to create the Common, which remains open, surrounded by excellent examples of 18th and 19th century architecture.