

ROGERS' RANGERS BRIDGE

As you walk, bike, snowmobile or drive over the bridge, you might contemplate this beautiful stretch of the Connecticut River and its history.

Connecting the Granite and Green Mountain States

The 407-mile-long Connecticut River is the longest water course in New England and for 157 miles it forms the New Hampshire-Vermont boundary. The first bridge over the Connecticut was between Walpole and Bellows Falls, erected in 1785 about 100 miles downstream from here. In 1804, a bridge was built here between Lancaster and Guildhall, one in a flurry of privately chartered toll bridges constructed in the early 1800s. The Lancaster- Guildhall toll bridge soon was a regionally important crossing, a link in a route across northern New England to the Canadian border near Montreal. Today's bridge is a fifth-generation structure, preceded by spans built in 1804, the early 1840s, 1902 and 1950.



The fourth bridge of 1950, which was dedicated the Rogers' Rangers Bridge shortly after it opened, was a Parker high-truss bridge. It stood until being replaced in 2020. Views from left to right, (1) looking east from Vermont, (2) looking upstream at the eastern span on the New Hampshire side of the river, (3) detail of truss web, (4) view under bridge looking west toward Vermont. Image credit: Rob Tucher, photographer; HAER NH-56.

A Good HAER Day

In 2018, the Rogers' Rangers Bridge was documented to the standards of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a program of the National Park Service. HAER serves as a permanent archive of significant American engineering and is housed at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Records consist of high-quality black-and-white photography, drawings and brief written histories. NHDOT and VTrans sponsored the HAER documentation of the Rogers' Rangers Bridge. To learn more about the hundreds of historic bridges documented by HAER and its sister program the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), visit www.loc.gov.

Truss Bridge Anatomy 101

Bridges are classified by their superstructure, that portion of the bridge that rests on the piers and abutments, which are usually stone or concrete, and referred to as substructure. Until recently, the Rogers' Rangers Bridge and its predecessors were truss superstructures. Trusses historically have been composed of wood, iron or steel. They are actually big "beams" with open webs formed by triangles. The patterns are often named after a builder or an engineer. The Rogers' Rangers Bridge of 1950 to 2020 was a Parker truss. This design, named after engineer Charles H. Parker (1842-1897), was admirably suited to longer spans of up to 250 feet or so. At least two-dozen steel Parker truss bridges carried roadways in New Hampshire and Vermont, the majority built in the 1920s and the 1930s. Today, less than half survive, mostly in Vermont. The Rogers' Rangers Bridge is believed to have been the last Parker truss bridge built in either state.



Rogers' Rangers Bridge, General Elevation of the two-span Parker truss bridge of 1950, replaced in 2020. The plans were prepared by the State of New Hampshire, Highway Department Bridge Division, Feb. 1944, revised through Dec. 1949, as it took nearly five years to secure funding.



Major Robert Rogers (1731-1795), from a color mezzotint by Johann Martin Will, 1776. Image credit: Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection.

Who Were Rogers' Rangers?

Rogers' Rangers were skilled backwoodsmen who fought for the British during the French & Indian War (1754-1763). Major Robert Rogers (1731-1795) formed the unit in Portsmouth, N.H. in 1756. Rogers developed a style of guerilla warfare known as ranging, which was new to the British army. Rangers relied on rigorous physical training and learned to live off the land behind enemy lines. Rogers' Rules of Ranging are still used by teachers in the U.S. Army's Ranger School. Although Rogers' Rangers mainly saw action in the Champlain and upper Hudson valleys, they passed through Lancaster in late 1759 after raiding a French-allied Abenaki Indian settlement at St. Francis, Quebec.

Timeline

1790

A ferry begins operating between Lancaster and Guildhall

1804

Lancaster Bridge Co. chartered to build a toll bridge near the ferry

1844

A two-span covered bridge built to replace an earlier bridge

1895

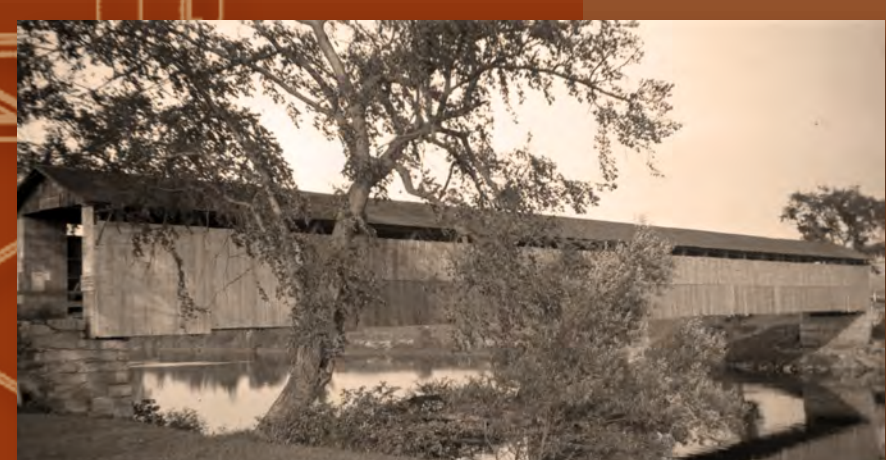
The bridge becomes toll free after being purchased by the towns for \$2,200



This 1890s view looking toward Vermont shows the second Lancaster- Guildhall bridge, built prior to 1844. It shows a log jam building up behind the bridge, caused by lumbermen floating logs downstream to sawmills, damaging the bridge in the process.

1902

The towns build a new two-span covered bridge for \$7,000



The third Lancaster-Guildhall bridge of 1902, shown here in 1922, stood until being replaced by the Rogers' Rangers Bridge in 1950. Image credit: Storrs Photograph Collection, N.H. Division of Historical Resources.

1926

With automobile travel on the increase the bridge is designated part of U.S. Route 2

1950

The N.H. State Highway Dept. builds a two-span, steel Parker high-truss bridge to replace the covered bridge at a cost of \$261,000. Later, in 1951, the bridge is dedicated as the Rogers' Rangers Bridge.

2020

NHDOT and VTrans replace the Parker high-truss bridge with a new steel girder bridge at a cost of \$11.5 million



Construction view showing the new steel girder bridge (left) and the Parker truss bridge prior to demolition, 2020.

Rogers' Rangers Bridge, General Plan of the two-span Parker truss bridge of 1950.



All images courtesy of NHDOT unless otherwise noted.

Funding for this sign made possible by NHDOT. The sign fulfills a stipulation developed in consultation with the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources to mitigate replacement of the historic Rogers' Rangers Bridge. Sign content by Hunter Research, Inc. Graphic design by Douglas Scott.

Visit the sign on the Vermont side of the bridge to learn more about Native people and the archaeology of the Lancaster-Guildhall crossing.