

The Bridger



The Vermont Covered Bridge Society Newsletter

MAY, 2000

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DEADLINE FOR NEXT NEWSLETTER - August 10, 2000

THE VERMONT COVERED BRIDGE SOCIETY ANNOUNCED!

Cambridge, VT - The Vermont Covered Bridge Society, Inc., incorporated in February, 2000, is now open for memberships. The Society was founded to address concerns about the loss of Vermont's historically significant wooden spans. We hope you will join us in preserving, exploring, and enjoying our unique collection of covered bridges.

The Society owes its existence to William McKone, resident of the Town of Cambridge, member of the newly organized Cambridge Historical Society, and member of the local Chamber of Commerce. Cambridge is the home of two covered bridges, one of which is badly in need of restoration. When federal funds for restoring covered bridges became available through U.S. Senator James Jeffords, Bill McKone set aside his other affairs and began to aggressively rally concerned people to found a covered bridge society in Vermont.

McKone first recruited Joe Nelson, author of the book "Spanning Time: Vermont's Covered Bridges." He then approached Ed Barna, author of the book "Covered Bridges of Vermont." Ed Barna joined the cause with enthusiasm. Senator Jeffords' staff used photographs from Nelson's book in the Senator's presentation to the U.S. Senate for the adoption of his funding bill. After passage of the bill, Jeffords' staff consulted Ed Barna on which of Vermont's covered bridges were most in need of funds.

Bill McKone, Joe Nelson and Ed Barna thank Richard Wilson, David Wright, Richard Roy, Terry Shaw, and Douglass Porter for joining the VCBS Board of Directors. Dick Wilson is President of the New York Covered Bridge Society, David Wright and Dick Roy are President and Vice President of the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges. These two organizations have long been watching Vermont's covered bridges with loving concern and the VCBS will gratefully benefit from their long experience with speaking and acting for the preservation of historic bridges. Terry Shaw is a concerned citizen and Cambridge businessman and Doug Porter, a new resident of Cambridge, is a consultant in the field of the preservation of historic architecture.

FIRST VCBS BOARD MEETING

Jeffersonville, VT - The first meeting of the VCBS board was held on April 13 near Jeffersonville with the four officers, three directors, and several guests present. The agenda dealt mainly with basic administrative and organizational matters with discussion of each item among the group. As a result, the main procedures, policies, and documents for the VCBS have been approved. Specific actions included:

1. The proposed constitution and by-laws were tentatively approved at the meeting, including a change suggested by Dick Wilson, President of the New York society. A two week period was allowed for additional changes to be proposed and incorporated; both governing documents are now considered to be approved and in effect.
2. A key position in the VCBS, that of chairman of the "bridge-watch" areas, has been filled by John Weaver, P.E. who will coordinate the establishment of the areas and the recruitment of volunteers to take responsibility for bridges throughout the state. (Several areas have already been formed under a regional "chapter" concept, e.g. Lyndon town and Lamoille County)
3. It was agreed that for now there will be three additional committees established for publicity, membership, and planning and budget.
4. Specific tasks and the members who have r agreed to undertake them until volunteers are found are as follows:
 - President Joe Nelson will handle production of "The Bridger" newsletter in addition to his numerous other duties.
 - Vice-President Ed Barna will oversee efforts at publicity, as well as recruit for the Brandon area bridge-watch group and explore the use of GPS mapping data.
 - Treasurer Shirley Hill will approach an acquaintance about heading up the legislative watch.
 - Secretary Bill McKone will continue to handle membership applications and work on submission of our application for 501 (c) 3 non-profit status.
 - Advisory Director Dick Wilson will act as correspondent for the Bennington area.
 - Director Terry Shaw is checking on an insurance policy for the VCBS (and has already reported back on initial findings) and bulk mailing requirements.
 - Thanks to life member Ron Bechard for his assistance at the meeting with the tape recorder.
5. A lively discussion of specifics about various bridges (the fun part!) accompanied lunch and after the meeting was adjourned, a group visited the two bridges in the area owned by Cambridge town (also fun!). Mr. Weaver provided some very informative specific comments on how the bridge-watch groups could contribute to the preservation and attractiveness of the bridges. The Canyon bridge, still in use, is structurally sound, but needs cosmetic work. The Cambridge Junction bridge, however, is in very bad condition and needs repairs urgently to prevent its loss. See the related article on this subject.

CAMBRIDGE JUNCTION BRIDGE THREATENED

Jeffersonville, VT - The visit to the Cambridge Junction (or Poland) Bridge after the first VCBS board meeting (see article) has resulted in a series of informational exchanges to alert various governmental agencies to its serious condition. Based on his assessment that the bridge is structurally not sound and is badly in need of extensive repair work, John Weaver, P.E. has checked with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VAOT) and determined that there are currently no plans for any repair work to be done. This bridge is one of the two that Senator Jeffords singled out for considerable funds for restoration under the Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Act that he succeeded in having passed last October. None of the funds have yet been released by the US Department of Transportation, however, as the



Cambridge Junction Bridge
Photo by Joe Nelson, 1992

specific rules for their use have apparently not yet been established.

VCBS Secretary William McKone has provided copies of email exchanged by Weaver with other VAOT personnel to the selectmen of the Town of Cambridge, "owners" of the bridge. They were already familiar with the VCBS as McKone had briefed them on the existence and objectives of the organization and provided an informational report following Weaver's visit to the bridge on April 13. This report included a suggestion by Weaver that the removal of the decking would take a substantial bit of the dead load off the bridge (but that it would have to be done very carefully).

An effort is being made to determine the status of the federal funds and hopefully get an emergency allocation that would allow at least minimal repairs to be made before winter when the bridge would have to carry the snow load and then be subject to buffeting by ice in the spring run off. McKone has written a letter (with copies of the email exchanges attached) to Jeff Munger at Senator Jeffords' Rutland office, the point of contact on this matter. Munger telephoned McKone on May 17 to discuss the situation and will be contacting the senator's Washington office to find out the status of the funds and whether any money could be made available in time to do some essential repairs before winter sets in.

"This situation points out the benefits of having an organization like the VCBS with its state-wide perspective and local roots." said McKone "We can serve a useful purpose in initiating actions, serving as a gathering place for information and a conduit for distributing it, and working with the local governments like the Cambridge select board to support and encourage their efforts to preserve the covered bridges for which they are responsible."

Lyndon! The Covered Bridge Capital of the Northeast Kingdom!

By Joe Nelson

Lyndon, VT., May 5, 2000 - "Welcome to Lyndon," declares the sign posted on Route 5 across from I91 's exit 23 at Lyndonville: "The Covered Bridge Capital of the Northeast Kingdom!"

The Town of Lyndon is home to five covered bridges and host to the Lyndon Covered Bridge Ten-kilometer Volksmarch program. Aware of the importance of the old spans to the community, the Lyndon Area Chamber of Commerce and the Town have undertaken a revitalization program for their bridges and their sites.

Four years ago Jim Fearon, a director of the Lyndon Area Chamber of Commerce, and a retired park and recreation director, formed a covered bridge preservation committee.

Mr. Fearon is the chairman of the Bridge Committee, the organization that has been the driving force in the effort to repair the bridges and improve their surroundings.

The committee members are Ellen Doyle, Chamber Vice President and owner of Green Mountain Books; Harriet Fisher, author of several local history books and a member of the Historical Society; Craig Klemon, the Town Administrative Assistant; and Dr. John Elliot, owner and operator of Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Clinic on South Wheelock Road.



School House Bridge
Photo by Joe Nelson, 1994

In November of 1998 the committee submitted The Lyndon Covered Bridges Preservation and Recreation Use Plan, covering the Randall, School House, Chamberlin, and Sanborn bridges. The Plan stated: "With the success in [19] 98 of the Volksmarch program which was sponsored by the chamber hosting 200 visitors, most from out of state, we must continue to improve the general appearance of (the bridges and make them user friendly. Parking, picnic tables, falls observation decks and interpretive sign age can make the bridges an important part of the Lyndon experience."

The plan listed improvement projects for each bridge and proposed responsibility for them to several Lyndon organizations including the Town of Lyndon Highway Department, the Rotary, the Grange, the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, and students from Lyndon State College and Lyndon Institute. The projects for The School House and Sanborn bridges were completed in 1999; installation of roadside posts, topsoil and seeding, planting flower beds and trees at the School House Bridge; the repair of the siding and painting the portals of the Sanborn.

"We have five bridges and it's been a struggle to get going on some of the projects," said Fearon. "I had a friend who was a bridge engineer for the highway department look at the bridges, particularly the Randall Bridge, which by the way, is owned by the chamber of commerce (The town sold the bridge to the Chamber for one dollar). The town did a lot of work there, landscaping and regrading the area.

"Our primary problem is with the Randall Bridge, it's the apparent undercutting of one of the abutments. The Chamber came up with about \$400 to hire a contractor to tie some of the timbers together, to patch the holes in the tin roof and some other structural work on the bridge, but our next big project will be s work on the abutment footer wall."

A canoe and fishing access, and additional landscaping, including a picnic table are planned for completion this year by the preservation plan proposed this April: Work on the abutment is slated for completion by 2004, and further work on the bridge structure and roof is to be completed by 2008, these last requiring a grant and a fund raiser.

"About ten students from Lyndon State College worked on the Sanborn Bridge," Fearon said. "They repainted the portals, repaired the roof and put used barn boards along the walk-side so the view from Route 5 is fairly good now.

"We've involved the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and Dr. Elliott with the planting at the School House Bridge; flower beds and some very large maple a trees, and we have the Feed and Weed Garden Club based in St. Johnsbury coming up probably next week to do some additional planting.

"The medical staff at the medical center has volunteered to do the painting on the School House Bridge. (The school building the bridge is named for now houses the medical center.) Dr. Elliott is interested in continuing the relationship with both bridges, the Chamberlin as well. With the cooperation of the town we re-landscaped that whole School House area and limited the amount of parking on the west side of it. And the area is well mowed, done by a volunteer who lives next door.

"We've put a picnic table in the bridge so that visitors there will have an opportunity to have a picnic lunch, and we'd like to do that at the Randall, too.

"For the Chamberlin Mill, we're talking about additional visitor facilities including an observation deck to view the double waterfall under the bridge. It's an effort to get a little closer to the falls for the people doing the Volksmarch and for visitors that might come to look at the bridge. It's a 1790 mill site area and a lot of the original mill foundations are still there. We're looking at possibly some more off-street parking and some interpretive signs done through the Historical Society. The property by the bridge is privately owned so we're working with the owner to try to get at least a lifting of the limbs on the trees so visitors can observe the mill site better.

"At the Millers Run Bridge, we hope to beautify the area to the north of the bridge with some tree planting and seeding. There is potential for canoe access there also."

Asked if the general public in the Town has shown interest, Fearon replied: "The general public is involved with the Volksmarch Program sponsored by the Chamber. Last year we had some 217 out-of-staters, some from as far away as the west coast coming in by bus for the Volksmarch, a ten-kilometer walk that takes in four of the bridges, the campus of the Lyndon Institute and the college.

"Volksmarch is a national program; there are three or four marches in Vermont and about a thousand in the

United States that operate year around. As far as we know we are the only one able to take in four covered bridges. Some of them come to see the covered bridges specifically, but mostly it's for credit on the Volksmarch. They get awards for completing a certain number of walks. We operate under the sponsorship of the Twin States Volkssport Association based in Middlebury."

"The Chamber of Commerce here is adopting the slogan we just put on the new welcome sign right opposite exit 23 as you come into Lyndonville: 'Welcome to Lyndon, The Covered Bridge Capital of the Northeast Kingdom.' We're promoting the bridges at our information booth which is manned seven days a week during the summer months in down town Lyndonville. We have copies of the walk, directions to the bridges and a pamphlet to give to visitors." The Northeast Kingdom is comprised of three counties; Caledonia, Essex and Orleans. "There are those who would stretch those borders south to Cabot and west to Montgomery," said Jim Fearon, born and raised in Canaan, "But it just isn't so!"

The Paper Mill Bridge To Be Completed in July

by Joe Nelson

Bennington - May 16, 2000. The contract for the replica covered bridge at Bennington Falls calls for completion by July, 2000, said Mark Mackintosh, VAOT Structures Engineer. "The contractor is not pressed for time now, it could easily be completed in June.

"We have all the roof rafters on, so the ridgepole is done, end to end," Mackintosh said. "We have about half of the upper and lower knee-braces in, they go from the ridge-pole down to the upper chord members to provide stability for the top-half of the bridge. The going has been slow at this time because cutting the knee-braces is a slow and meticulous job. They've stopped that work while they're waiting for another shipment of southern yellow pine. Right now they're tightening the glulam deck which is held to the floor beams by bolts."

The contractor is Blow and Cote, Inc. of Morrisville. When the roof structure is completed the contractor will install the roofing and the siding. Asked about paint, Mackintosh replied; "We are going to do our best to match the old color, taking into account the old color is faded." Traditionally, all of Bennington's covered bridges have been painted a rich barn red.

Built in 1889, possibly by Benjamin Sears, the old bridge was bypassed by a temporary single-lane steel span in the 1980s. It continued to serve strollers and cyclists until 1994, when it was blocked against all traffic by the town. A Vermont Agency of Transportation inspection had found it to be critically deteriorating and on the verge of collapse. The inspection team recommended that the bridge be rehabilitated for moderate traffic.

The bridge was removed from over the river by crane in December, 1999. The structure was disassembled on the ground and the reusable material set aside. The badly deteriorated parts of the structure, mostly from the roof, was burned at the site.



Paper Mill Bridg, Bennington.
Photo by David Guay, May 9, 2000

Browns River Bridge; A Preservation Story

Westford, VT - Westford's covered bridge is just \$2000 away from the big move back over the Browns River!

One of the last big steps toward completing the Browns River Covered Bridge preservation project was realized when Gilbert Newbury stepped forward to serve as Project Engineer, a state requirement toward completing the project, said Caroline Brown, President of the Westford Historical Society.

"We are pleased to have Gil Newbury, P.E. as our Project Engineer, joining us in the effort to see a completion to Westford's Browns River Covered Bridge project," said Brown. "Mr. Newbury has informed us that he may be able to bring to this project up to an additional \$50,000 from the district Bridge & Culvert program, and have it applied to preliminary engineering and possibly to bridge decking, drainage and repairing the abutment stonework."



Brown's River Bridge
Photo by Joe Nelson, 1996

Newbury is District Transportation Administrator with the VAOT in District 8, St. Albans.

The Historical Society, which has recently received a \$1000 donation and with \$2,000 in its reserve fund, is looking for additional donations to reach the \$5000 goal, hopefully this year.

The Westford Historical Society has been working since 1987 to save the Browns River Bridge. The Society contracted with Milton Graton and Sons, of New Hampshire to move the failing bridge from over the river and restore it. The work was funded with ham suppers, local donations and federal grants, all to save the bridge without burdening the town residents with taxes. It has been a project unique in that all of the fund raising was done by a handful of historical society members. Meanwhile work continues in planning and assembling the bid packages for the contract to move the bridge back over the river.

For a history and photos of the bridge, built in 1836, go to www.vermontbridges.com

Bridge Watch Program Initiated

Jeffersonville, VT John Weaver, P.E., at the VCBS Board Meeting held on April 13th, accepted the position of statewide coordinator of the Bridge Watch and Adopt-A-Bridge program. He is also Bridge Watch Area Chairman for Northfield and East Montpelier.

Tentative Bridge Watch Areas were defined for coverage and will be evaluated further as the program develops. John is preparing a pilot letter to select boards in his assigned areas. This document describes the goals and aims of the VCBS and asks permission of (and cooperation from) local authorities for involvement with covered bridge structures. We still need volunteers for other areas to serve as Watch chairpersons or to participate on Adopt-A-Bridge committees.

In developments since the meeting of the 13th, Jim Fearon of Lyndon has volunteered to chair the Lyndon Bridge Watch, and Bill McKone, as temporary chair, is organizing Cambridge and Jeffersonville as part of a Lamoille Area Chapter.

July 3rd to be Tunbridge's Big Day!

Tunbridge, VT - On July 3, beginning at 9 a.m., several teams of local oxen will be used to draw Tunbridge's new covered bridge across the river. The process is expected to take about eight hours. The span won't be ready for traffic for another week, however, as the deck won't be installed until after the bridge is in place on its abutments. After the "pulling," entertainment will be provided at the fairground, followed by fireworks at dusk.

The new bridge replaces the Mill Bridge, built by Arthur G. Adams in 1883, and lost to an ice jam in March,

1998. The replacement was designed by Phil Pierce, P.E. and is being constructed by contractor Neil Daniels.
For more information about the history of the bridge and its loss, go to www.vermontbridges.com.



It was in May, thirty-six years ago, that I wrote "To A Covered Bridge" for my mother's birthday. Over the years, she had taken snap shots of as many Vermont covered bridges as we had visited, and made scrap books for each county, containing news reports and photos.

We children and grandchildren have continued her interests, and are delighted that at long last Vermont has a C.B. Society.

My son, Jim Patch, made this computer copy of "To A Covered Bridge" which I am glad to have you use in any way in which it might benefit V.C.B.S. inc.

Yours Truly, Iona Woods Patch

TO A COVERED BRIDGE

Oh, Covered Bridge -
Lovely, romantic spot -
The stories you would tell
If only you could talk.

Of your builders -
Unassuming, honest men,
Whose century-old work still serves
A good job well-done.

You are a memorial -
Silent, sturdy, useful yet. -
To those who here dreamed and built
And to their craftsmanship.

You are History -
A quiet, peaceful path
For the onward march of progress
Across this great land,

You are a symbol
Of a way since gone;
But you still stand firm
and beckon us on.

Oh, Covered Bridge,
You do seem to speak today -

"Build well for those who follow,
that their crossing may be safe."

[Editor - Thank you for your contribution, Ms. Wood. We will post your fine verse on some of our bridges.]

Charles Elflein of Rotterdam, NY writes "I was thrilled to receive my membership card It sounds as if you've lined up a "great team" for this new organization.

"Have you thought of a slogan for the VCBS? Here's one I came up with: 'Working all together to restore our bridges better.'"

[Editor - Good Idea Mr. Elflein! Readers, can you suggest a slogan for the VCBS? If you have a catchy line, please send it to me, Joe Nelson, at P.O. Box 267, Jericho, VT 05465, or to jcnelson@together.net]

BRIDGE TALK

The Apparent Reserve Load Carrying Capacity of Covered Bridges

by John H. Weaver, P.E.

I have often been intrigued by the apparent reserve load carrying capacity of covered bridges, that is, their apparent ability to carry loads beyond their analyzed limits to do so. I realize that there may be material properties which explain this phenomenon to some extent, such as moisture content, superior mechanical properties of old growth timber, etc. I participated in the evaluation review of some of these material properties when we sponsored materials studies of the Hopkins and Paper Mill bridges.

I think, however, that secondary structural and appurtenant members of these bridges may also explain some of the reserve capacity. These members are curbs, upper chord truss bracing, the roof system, wood flooring and floor beams acting as a plate unit, outside nailers attached to the trusses, etc.

Here is my theory: Although we at VAOT (myself included) have often (conservatively) only analyzed (for load bearing capacity) the trusses of these bridges, we should make some estimate of the structural contributions from secondary and appurtenant components. On many covered bridges floor beams interlock with the trusses and the longitudinal flooring is attached to these members. Also upper lateral cross-bracing between trusses and roof rafters (with boarding) contribute to structural integrity by shear connection to the trusses.

Are these reasonable assumptions? I think they are, if the covered bridge components and attached members are in good condition with no obvious signs of detachment. I think this applies to many cases. Also shear connection of secondary or appurtenant members does not require anything more than spikes or notches to develop only a small fraction of structural enhancement. However, the better the shear connections, the greater the potential enhancement.

Were these secondary and appurtenant members originally intended to structurally enhance the covered bridges? Probably not. Their primary purpose was to keep the bridge dry or to provide bracing or to channel traffic. Nevertheless I think they do provide structural enhancement.

To apply my theory I analyzed the Sanderson Bridge: Plank lattice type with effective span of 111 feet. Just for comparison, I assumed the existing bridge members in new condition and compared an analysis of live load capacity of the trusses alone to capacity with enhancement due to the composite contribution from a small portion of the secondary and appurtenant member sections. I limited the contribution to what could be expected from very limited shear transfer at rafter fastenings. The live load capacity of the composite (enhanced) section was 40% greater than that of the trusses alone. I consider this to be a substantial increase.

[John Weaver, of VTrans Structures can be reached at john.weaver@state.vt.us.]

Volunteers wanted!

Membership Chairperson

Requirements: warm body and computer with e-mail address. If you have WordPerfect, it's a plus but not a

requirement.

Duties:

1. Issue membership cards to paid-up members, send welcoming letter to new members.
2. Solicit new members, Send out mailings, help design and participate in membership drives.
3. Maintain membership database and distribute data as required, create mailing labels, member lists, handle mail-merge for membership.

Newsletter Editor:

Requirements: warm body and computer with e-mail address. If you have WordPerfect, it's a plus but not a requirement.

Duty: Collect stories, edit, and compose the quarterly issues of The Bridger.

Staff writer:

Requirements: warm body and computer with e-mail address.

Duty: Write feature articles, assist Editor in collection of stories and rewrite as needed.

Correspondents:

Duties: Collect covered bridge items and stories from their home areas or travels, and send them to the editor.

Distribution:

Duties: Work with printer, handle billing, label and mail each issue of The Bridger.

Candidates please contact Joe Nelson, 2 Sugar Hill Road, Underhill, VT 05489, or to jcnelson@together.net]

A Note From the President

Welcome to the Vermont Covered Bridge Society, the VCBS! We are brand new, begun just this past winter. For some reason, we seem to be the first covered bridge society chartered in Vermont within living memory. Of course we have our two older sisters, the New York State Covered Bridge Society and the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges, both of which have been watching our bridges for years: Now that we are here, we three can treasure our bridges together.

The purpose of the VCBS is twofold: to preserve Vermont's Covered Bridges! And to provide fellowship for Bridgers!

The Vermont Covered Bridge Society, Inc. was incorporated in February, 2000 to address concerns about the loss of these important symbols of our heritage: Vermont's covered bridges. We hope you will join us in preserving, exploring, and enjoying our unique collection of covered bridges, all of them different and unique, each with a personality of its own.

The number of covered bridges in Vermont has dwindled from more than 500 to fewer than 100 today. While many were lost to the flood of 1927, significant numbers were lost to modernization and some to vandalism. The old bridges, built of timbers from long-gone forests, fashioned by long-gone craftsmen serve now as monuments to early times. Popular with visitors because they have an extraordinary ability to evoke the spirit of the past, taking us back to the days of horses and buggies, sleigh rides, and a simpler way of life. They are our inheritance, something left to us by our forbearers, reminding us of the years when our country was building up out of a wilderness.

When a bridge is in trouble, and repairs are on the agenda, the VCBS will be there to help preserve what makes a covered bridge valuable by lending its voice to advise town officials on the subject of preservation, help with fund raising, and to inform the public.

To help keep a covered bridge healthy and in service, VCBS volunteers see that the bridge gets the attention it needs by working with the town; brush clearing, sweeping, painting, fire proofing, removing graffiti, and keeping

watch.

The VCBS needs to help find funds to provide signage to direct the public to the bridges, and present historical data for bridge viewers; To provide volunteers to maintain Bridge Watches against vandalism and to notify authorities when a bridge needs attention; maintain liaison with other preservation organizations to lend voice in support of preserving covered bridges and to share resources.

The Vermont Covered Bridge Society can do none of these things without volunteers to support its programs!

We need Bridge-Watch Area Chairpersons to act as activities coordinators for each of several Bridge-Watch Areas; Adopt-a-bridge Group members to adopt a bridge and work with the town with clearing brush, sweeping, painting, fire proofing, removing graffiti, and keeping watch; a desk-top staff to publish *The Bridger*, our quarterly newsletter.

We need "Bridge-a-spondents;" community based reporters and traveling bridge fans to gather bridge news for the newsletter staff; people are needed for the Events Committee to plan gala bridge excursions, picnics, dinners and work parties; and people are needed for the Legislation Watch to maintain liaison with federal, state and local decision-makers, and to apply for grants to fund bridge preservation.

And of great importance; the Society needs dues-paying members to help fund the VCBS programs.

Yours in Bridging: Joe Nelson

Joe Nelson, P.O Box 267, Jericho, VT 05465-0267, jcnelson@together.net

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