# Burkeville Covered Bridge

- 1836: No road or bridge yet crossed the South River "Burke & Company dam" pond.
- 1837: Town Meeting voted to build a road leading to a 107'-long bridge at the site of the current covered bridge (a wooden bridge was built, possibly also covered).
- 1858: Mapping shows the 1837-built road and bridge - which was regularly maintained (1850, 1861, 1862, 1863, and 1864 bridge expenditures are noted in town records), until undermined in an 1869 flood.
- 1869: Following a torrential October 4 rainstorm, the 1837 road bridge over (renamed) "Delabarre Pond" - part of the Delabarre Woolen Mill water power infrastructure, formed by a dam in the South River just below the present location of the covered bridge - was severely weakened.
- 1870: At a May 21, 1870 Town Meeting the town voted to rebuild the 1837 bridge for less than $3,000. Construction on the Burkeville Covered Bridge by Sylvanus Sherman and 18 local helpers began in August, and concluded in May, 1871.
- 1938: Almost 70 years later, the covered bridge was damaged in the historic hurricane and flood. Replacing the bridge with a concrete span was considered, but rejected by townspeople. The town, county, and state collaborated to fund repairs in 1940 under the direction of Conway's Leon C. Germain. Further periodic repairs were made to the bridge in subsequent decades.
- 1985: Following inspection(s) of the 1871-built structure, on March 21 the state highway department ordered the posted covered bridge closed to traffic for safety reasons.
- 1988: The Historical Commission's application to place the Burkeville Covered Bridge on the National Register of Historic Places was accepted on September 1. The bridge design: a single truss of the multiple kingpost type (unique among the then-four, now-three remaining original 19th-century covered bridges in MA).
- 1992: Roger Easton, a NH engineering consultant hired by the Historical Commission, reported that "...while this is one of the best designed covered bridges I have ever seen, it does have problems with rotted lower chords and diagonals at both ends of the bridge...caused by decay fungi." Easton also said that the Burkeville bridge was the first he'd seen where the timber diagonals get smaller in cross-section as they reach the center of the bridge. This saves weight and transfers the major portion of the stress to the timbers and wrought-iron nearest the river banks. Overall, it's an "outstanding example" of a covered bridge, he said.

- 1993: In March, a $198,960 federal timber bridge program grant was awarded to the state, as the federal government's 80% share of the planned bridge renovation.

- 1994: As part of years of other volunteer fundraising activities, the Historical Commission published a short history of the bridge in booklet form, and the Quilting Club made and auctioned a quilt to help raise bridge renovation funding.

- 2003: After repeated Mass Highway false starts, delays, abandoned designs, a failed 1998 construction contract, and the years of local lobbying and fundraising, a Fay, Spofford & Thorndike-designed renovation (with added steel supports and bracing, as approved by the Massachusetts Historical Commission) finally went out to bid.

- 2003: Bids came in well above construction estimates, but, after further local lobbying (including transmission to the state of a 2001 hearing transcript), on October 15th the state Board of Highway Commissioners proceeded to award the $1,092,940 low-bid contract to Petricca Construction of Pittsfield, MA - which subcontracted, for the timber-framing work, with covered bridge expert Stan Graton of 3G Construction, Inc. of New Hampshire.

- 2004: Work began and this time continued without incident until the contracted renovation was successfully completed in October, 2005. Newly-installed bollards, however, now prevented vehicle access to the bridge.

- 2006: On April 10, Annual Town Meeting reaffirmed its long and consistent support for a usable ('living history') covered bridge open to passenger-vehicle traffic.

- {Politics ensued...}

- 2013: In May, state bridge engineer Alexander Bardow confirmed in writing to the town that the renovated covered bridge has a state-assigned carrying capacity of 15 tons, and detailed the minor steps needed for the town to re-open the bridge, at its discretion, to vehicular traffic -- which the town proceeded to do in October.

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In case anyone wants to reach them (regarding what tire-conveyed road salt is likely to do to the bridge, or for any other reason), fairly dated contact information for:

1. Bridge Designer Dan Lee at Fay, Spofford & Thorndike, Burlington: 781-221-1145

Corporate Headquarters; 5 Burlington Woods; Burlington, MA 01803
Tel: (781) 221 - 1000//Tel: (800) 835 - 8666//Fax: (781) 229 - 1115

2. Bridge Builder Stan Graton, at 3G Construction in Holderness, NH: 603-968-9587

3G Construction Inc.; PO Box 183; Howe Rd.; Holderness, NH 03245

*- S.W., 10/16/2013*
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