

The Canterbury Bridge

Archaeologists believe the first humans came to the area now known as New Hampshire more than 12,000 years ago. From 7000 to 1000 B.C.E. Native Americans moved seasonally around this area to live, hunt, gather, trade, and fish. After glaciers receded and climate warmed First Nations people became more settled and less nomadic as the growing season expanded. Bands in the north of New England probably engaged in more hunting and gathering while those further south engaged in agriculture and fisheries. Trade between this area and the St. Lawrence and Lake Champlain valleys was common, as it was with bands further south and west. Rivers were major thoroughfares for travel.

From about 1000 B.C. to 1600 A.D. the Native Americans, in our area Abenaki, (people from where the sun rises at the bottom of the hills) specifically Pennacooks, Cowasucks, Pequawkets, Ondieki, Sokwakis, and Saco established villages and developed trade networks, developed basketry and ceramic production for storage vessels, and used bow and arrow technology.



Only one reference was found concerning floods prior to the coming of the English to New England in 1620. This reference appears in John Jossely's 'An account of Two Voyages to New England,' first published in 1674 and quoted by the Federal Writers' Project 1938, p. 28. The account is so purely legendary that it has no value in extending the knowledge of historical floods before the dates of English settlement.

Ask them whither they go when they dye, they will tell you pointing with their finger to Heaven beyond the White Mountains, and do hint at Noah's Floud, as may be conceived by a story they have received from Father to Son, time out of mind, that a great while ago their Countrey was drowned, and all the People and other Creatures in it, only one Powaw and his Webb forseeing the Floud fled to the white mountains carrying a hare among with them and so escaped; after a while the Powaw sent the Hare away, who not returning emboldened thereby they descended, and lived many years after, and had many Children, from whom the Countrie was filled again with Indians.

The intersection of the Merrimack and Contoocook Rivers became a major trade point and meeting place for gatherings in the lower intervale. Much historical evidence of this occupation has been washed away over time by ravaging floods. The Boscawen Historical Society has two collections of indigenous material, collected by local residents Charles Folsom and Lincoln Adams.

The Pennacooks in this area had contact with Europeans as early as 1628, when this area was first explored and mapped by O.G. Hammond from Portsmouth surveying for the Masonian Grants for the Province of New Hampshire. There is evidence of this on Queen Street in the Compass Arrows that mark the first Provincial New Hampshire survey. This was a century prior to the settlement in 1733 of The King's Grant of Contoocook Plantation, as the town of Boscawen was originally granted to the Newbury Proprietors in the Province of Massachusetts by King George II and Queen Caroline.

White Man's Disease deeply affected those without immunity. It wasn't only disease that wiped out the native population: enslavement, assimilation, intermarriage, tuberculosis, syphilis, and alcoholism all created havoc amongst the aboriginal population. These were difficult times for both the indigenous population and the European settlers, mostly from the British Isles, during a long period of what is now called the French and Indian Wars, but really were religious wars in Europe between the Catholics and the Protestants that got played out in North America. The Merrimack and its tributaries provided routes for raids from the "French and Indians" in Quebec as the early trappers and traders from France and Scotland were mostly men, and they valued women and children as hostages for redemption, slaves, or marriage until 1760.

The Provinces of New Hampshire and Massachusetts

Contoocook Plantation in the Province of Massachusetts was granted by King George II in 1733 to the Newbury proprietors bounded by the three intervalles on the river, as surveyed early by Richard Hazzen. This was after rejecting earlier proposals from residents of both Woburn and Andover, Massachusetts to settle this land on the west side of the Merrimack River, as well as a previous proposal from Newbury.

Canterbury in the Province of New Hampshire was granted by Gov. John Wentworth in 1727 as part of the Masonian Patent grants for land on the east side of the Merrimack River. However, the western boundary of Canterbury was 606 rods from the river, running along the upland ridge, not down to the fertile intervale land opposite Boscawen Plain on this side of the river. Some of the original settlers of Contoocook Plantation lived on Canterbury land until the boundaries were set in 1760 and Contoocook Plantation was renamed Boscawen.

Contoocook Plantation

"The Last Settlement Facing the Canadian Border"

(Until 1760)

The residents of the towns of Newbury, Newburyport, and Amesbury became restless as the population grew. A group of citizens, known as "the Proprietors" formed to decide where to go to settle in

the wilderness further up the Merrimack river. In 1732 John Coffin and eighty other citizens petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts Bay for “a grant of land, situated on the west side of the Merrimack, adjoining Penacook plantation.” (now Concord). Conditions of the affirmative decision required:

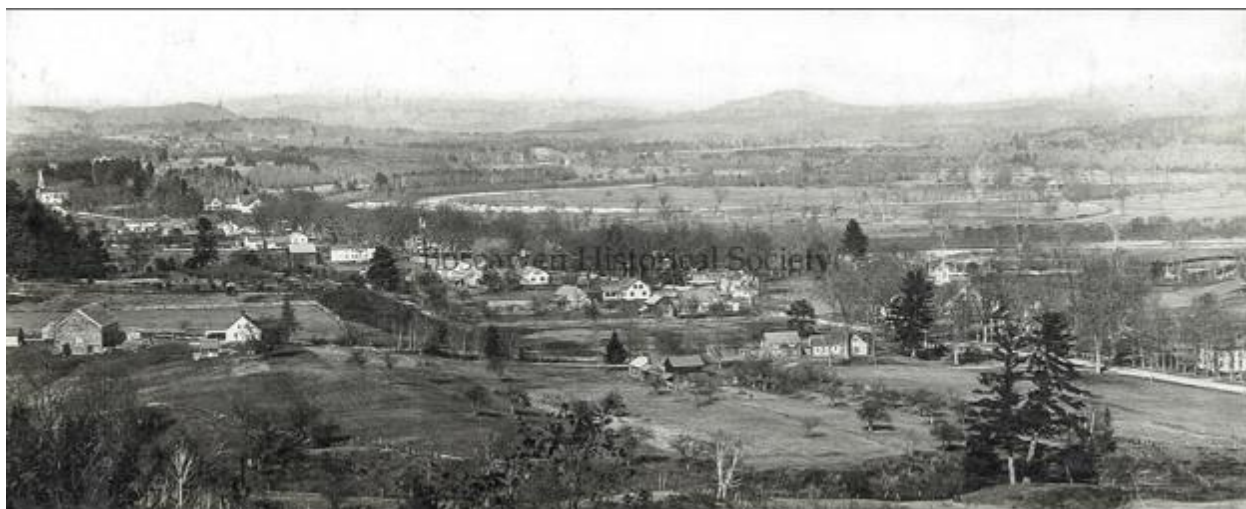
“Ordered that there be and hereby is granted to the petitioners a tract of land seven miles square at the place petitioned for on the west side of the Merrimack river, to be laid out by a surveyor and chain men on oath, a plan thereof to be presented to this court at their next May session for confirmation. The lands to be by them settled on the conditions following vis:

“That within the space of four years from the confirmation of this plan they settle and have on the spot eighty-one families, each settler to build a convenient dwelling house, one story high eighteen feet square at least, and fence and clear, and bring to four acres fit for improvement and three acres more well stocked with English grass; and also lay out three shares throughout the town, each share to be one eighty-fourth part of said tract of land, one, of said shares to be for the first settled minister, one for the ministry, and one for school; and also to build a convenient meeting house and settle a learned and orthodox minister within the time aforesaid.” This Order dated Dec. 8, 1732.

On May 14, 1733, Richard Hazzen, an experienced surveyor and his chainmen arrived to scope out a perimeter boundary for a proposed plantation, for 80 families. Settlement of a “Plantation” meant an entire community became settled at once, including surveyed home and intervalle lots, a town center, with the cemetery and adjacent meeting house as the principal monument of the survey, school and first minister’s lot, and the establishment of mills.

The area was to be bound as a 7-mile square, beginning “At the middle of the mouth of the Contoocook River where it Joyns on Pennycook Plantation. into the Merrimac” and tentatively bound by the Blackwater, the Contoocook, and the Merrimack rivers as the areas to be settled. **Hazen submitted his report, complete with map, to the Massachusetts General court on, if not before June 6, 1733.** When Richard Hazzen accepted 10 Pounds for “taking the plan of the plantation,” the vote in the affirmative by the Court led to the official founding of what became Contoocook Plantation in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. **The date – July 4, 1733 at John Melcher’s Tavern in Newbury.**

The first settlers arrived in the new settlement early in 1734. The first child Abigail Danforth was born on January 7, 1735, who grew up, married Thomas Foss, and is buried in the Plains Cemetery. Canterbury was settled the same year, in the Province of New Hampshire. The two towns in different colonies became one settlement, separated only by the Merrimack River. Northward of Contoocook there was unbroken wilderness reaching to Canada; “no settler had reared his cabin above the Contoocook intervalle. The men who set up their log houses on King Street were the advance guard of civilization.”



The Village on Boscawen Plain



GERRISH FERRY/CLEMENT'S FERRY

By 1738 no bridge had yet been erected across the Contoocook and Merrimack Rivers, and the only means of communication with PennyCook (Rumford) and Canterbury was by boat. Both the Merrimack and Contoocook were too deep to be forded most of the year. Up to this time settlers relied on small skiffs or using their horses and oxen to swim across the rivers. It became time for the establishment of a public ferry.

At the Proprietors' meeting it was voted, *"that Stephen Gerrish shall have six pounds paid him by the proprietors, his building a ferry boat and keeping said boat in good repair, and giving due & constant attendance to ye proprietors to ferry themselves and their creatures over Merrimack as followeth : (viz.) a man at two pence, a man and horse at four pence, a man and one yoke of oxen at six pence, a man and one cow at four pence and young creatures according to bigness; and at years end his returning said boat to the proprietors or to whom they appoint to receive the afore said boat, or six pounds in bills of credit of ye old tenor."*

The ferry was located at a bend of the Merrimack, above its junction with the Contoocook River. The ferry way was laid out from King Street to the bank of the Merrimack. The settlements of Canterbury and Contoocook Plantation were growing at the same time, and the ferry served both communities.

Clement's Ferry: According to Theo Silver in From Kings Grant Plantation to Home Town Heritage, "Begin at a stake on King Street two rods south of Moses Gerrish's house lot . . . on a road two rods wide. . ." "From King Street go down the road south of the 1913 Library building down into the intervale, to the river's edge at the mouth of Mill Brook." This was a much narrower crossing than where the 1804 Bridge was located.



An aerial view shows the common intervale owned by early residents of what is now Boscawen. Steven Gerrish's house was on the right side of the Y. The Ferry Road began adjacent to what is now the 1913 Library south of the intersection, and its location was about the point of the ox-bow and end of the intervale.

In later days ferries provided service in times of floods and spates when bridges washed out or floated away up and down the river. A chain ferry served the public when the Boscawen bridge was washed out by the freshet of 1839 until a new bridge was built by Boscawen and Canterbury at the junction of the Contoocook and Merrimack rivers.

It is said a ferry operated somewhere in Gerrish near Stirrup Iron road where the Province Road (originating in Portsmouth) crossed the Merrimack River from Northfield to Contoocook Plantation. The Province road continued to Fort #4 on the Connecticut River and on to Crown Point on Lake Champlain.

Sequential Bridges on The Plain

Plans for the first toll bridges over the Merrimack and Contoocook rivers occurred in 1802. Until then in periods of low water people, animals, and vehicles were sometimes able to ford the river; high water required the ferry in both locations in town.

In 1802 a bridge was built from Canterbury to the Boscawen Factory Village, in the area of the Hannah Dustin Monument and Commercial Street – The Boscawen Bridge. Capital stock had a par value of \$29, with 29 shareholders. It was also called “*Chandler’s Bridge*,” as Col. Isaac Chandler owned six of those shares; other shares were held by various citizens of Boscawen and Concord. When the 4th NH Turnpike was built from Portsmouth to Lebanon and Hanover, and the bridges charged tolls for passage, they were business corporations that built and maintained the road or bridge for the right to collect fees from travelers. They were the predecessors of canals and railroads and elicited political controversy. At the State House in Concord, our legislators felt that the traveling public should be able to cross rivers and streams without charge. While the corporations rarely made profits, they did attract enough interest to expand the quality and expansion of the road system in New England between 1800 and 1845.

In Rev. Mr. Price’s History of Boscawen From 1732 to 1820 he reported, “*In 1803 the Fourth N.H. Turnpike was opened, terminating at the Toll Bridge over the Merrimack River near Col. Isaac Chandler’s the preceding year.*” He goes on to report in 1804 “*And this year, a second bridge was built over Merrimack river, to Canterbury, by an incorporated company, and a road opened by the town to meet it, from King-street.*” This seems to indicate that our records of Ferry Road being further up-river than the Depot Street location are correct.

The first toll bridge between Boscawen Plain and Canterbury was erected in 1804 – The Canterbury Bridge. The users of both bridges paid tolls until 1816 when the Proprietors allowed people and animals to pass free of charge, **at their own risk**, because the bridges were no longer considered safe.

Both toll bridge signs still exist, with the toll rates of passage somewhat legible. The sign for the Canterbury Bridge is housed at the Boscawen Historical Society, where it can be seen during open hours. The Boscawen Bridge was built near the confluence of the Contoocook and Merrimack Rivers, and the sign is at the Canterbury Historical Society. These signs have identical fares and appear to be made by the same unnamed woodcarver.



The Great Freshet of 1819 swept the first bridge structure away, whereupon the Proprietors erected a **second** bridge, under the supervision of Col. Isaac Chandler of Boscawen and Jacob Blanchard of Canterbury. There became a movement to have free bridges originating from the State House in Concord, and eventually there were two free bridges built – one at the confluence and one to the north on Boscawen Plain, completed in the summer of 1820, but they were washed away in the Great Winter Freshet of February 1824.

On June 18, 1885 the Concord Monitor reported: *“Henry Gerrish, the son of Col. Henry Gerrish, who was the first settler on what is now the Merrimack County farm . . . mentioned the Great Freshet, and said there had never been anything like it since . . . I asked Mr. Gerrish how much higher this freshet was compared with others. He said fully 12 feet, and that it covered all the land on the opposite side of the river several feet deep, and the high ridges of land opposite the Boscawen depot were all under water. The whole valley of the Merrimack was a flood of water.”*

The **third** bridge, built by Benjamin Kimball of Boscawen for the Proprietors in 1825, remained in place until January 17, 1839. *“A great body of snow on the ground; a warm rain poured continuously nearly 36 hours – the approximately two feet of ice broke up. Every bridge on the Merrimack River south of Franklin, except Hooksett and Amoskeag Falls, was swept away.”*

The Proprietors built a **fourth** bridge, part of which was swept away in the winter of 1848. By then a major event destroyed much of the economy of Boscawen. In December of 1846 the railroad came to town. The construction of the Northern Railroad revolutionized transportation. Legislators in Concord now traveled by train; farmers, tanners, factory production no longer required teamsters to transport their goods great distances; the roads were no longer crowded with freight wagons. Tavern keepers cut down

signs, local hotels no longer served the travelling public. Stagecoaches provided mail and transport locally; however, rail took over transport for longer distances with faster travel. Lysias Emerson, the local stagecoach driver became the Rail Agent at the Boscawen depot; regular freight and passenger services came to town to last nearly a century. Trade and commerce moved along the rails and Concord became the business hub of the area. In 1847 the town fathers felt that bridge repairs were not a necessity.

Weigh Bills of Merchandise Transported by Concord Railway from Boscawen Station Southbound to Boston and Northbound to Potter Place

Lysias Emerson, Stationmaster

Down Train Dec. 30, 1846

G. R. Cheney	2 Cases of Shoes	.67	Boston
E. Cheney	1 Bag Shoes		
	1 Barrell Apples	.46	Lowell

Down Train Dec. 31, 1846

H.H. Call	2 Barrells Apples		
	2 Barrells Potatoes	1.17	Boston

Freight rates varied according to weight and destination. Some random entries are incomplete due to fading and penmanship include:

Up Train

Dr. Wood (the Minister)	Bags Oats	.20	Franklin
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Down Train,

4 ½ Cords of bark	1.62	Lowell
11 Barrells Apples	4.46	Lowell
4 Bags Beans	.29	Concord
296 Bushels Coal	10.06	Boston

Up Train, January 29, 1847

Greenleaf & Champney	20 Hogs	9.38
	2 Boxes Poultry	2.86
Levi Bartlett	8 tubs butter	.81



The bridge from King Street over the Northern Railway tracks going to the Canterbury Bridge, taken from the Boscawen Station. On the left are the Freight House and the Station. On the right is the Station Master's house, still standing. The area is now occupied by All States Asphalt and a parking area for the Northern Rail Trail.

Speed Limit on Bridges *In 1853 "The town passed a by-law forbidding persons to drive faster than a walk over any bridge that cost more than \$1,000. The penalty for such an offense was \$1." Coffin History*

Northern

of New Hampshire

AND BRANCHES



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ROUTE TO

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SUMMER ARRANGEMENT, 1884.

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Gen'l Supt.

GEO. W. GROVER, *Asst Gen'l Pass. Agent.*

HAN. AVER. SUPPLY CO., BOSTON.

B. F. KENDRICK,
Gen'l Pass. Agent.

1413

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NORTHERN DIVISION.

EXCURSION RATES

From BOSTON.

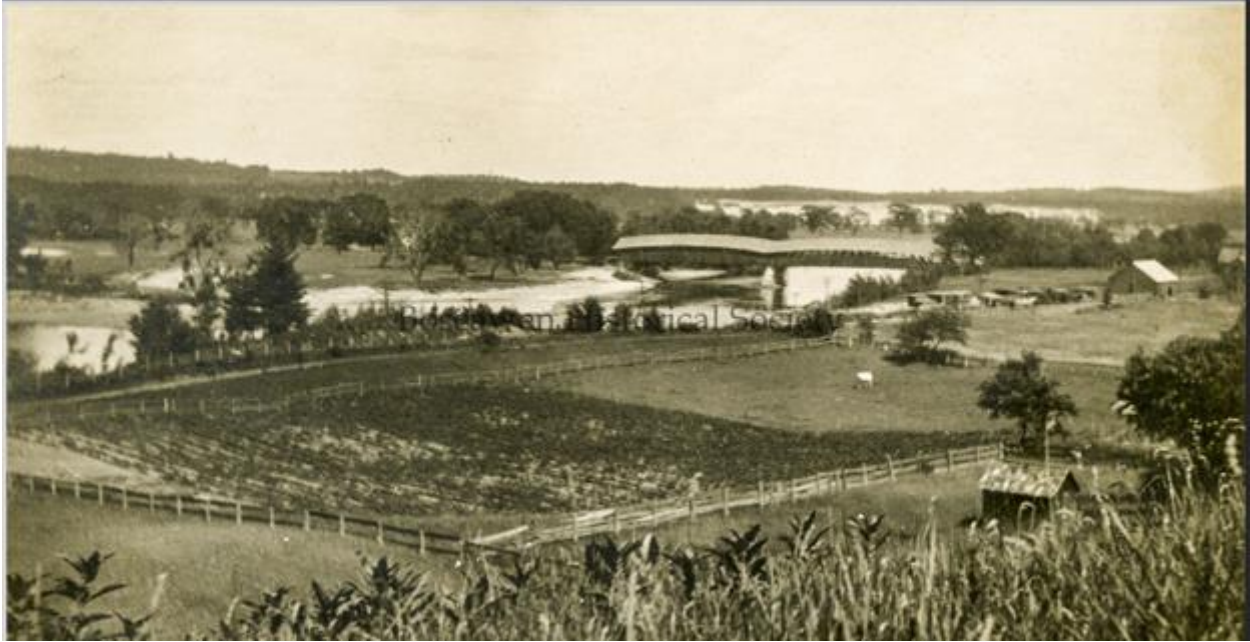
JUNE TO OCTOBER.

Boston to Bristol	and return, \$4.50
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" " Danbury.....	" " 5.00
" " Grafton	" " 5.25
" " Grafton Centre	" " 5.25
" " Canaan.....	" " 5.50
" " Enfield.....	" " 6.00
" " East Lebanon.....	" " 6.10
" " Lebanon.....	" " 6.25
" " White River Junction.....	" " 6.40
" " Hillsboro (via Concord).....	" " 4.75
" " Hillsboro (via Hancock Je.) ..	" " 4.75
" " Warner	" " 4.25
" " Bradford, N.H.....	" " 4.75
" " Newbury, N.H.....	" " 5.00
" " Sunapee.....	" " 5.50

For Tickets and all information apply to

PASSENGER AGENCY, No. 5 State Street,
and

BOSTON & LOWELL PASSENGER DEPOT,
CAUSEWAY STREET, BOSTON.



THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

The Rainbow Bridge from Boscawen Plain sometime between 1857 and 1905

B & M Railroad Buildings on top center right

The bridge built on Boscawen Plain in 1857 was designed so securely that no floods ever weakened its piers. It lasted in place until 1907, when the present handsome new steel span was constructed by both towns. With the coming of the railroad on both sides of the Merrimack, commerce in Boscawen and Canterbury moved to Concord. The lower of the two bridges over the Contoocook at Hannah Dustin got carried away in the freshet of March 2, 1896, and they used the old chain ferry until 1898 when a new steel bridge was built.

After the Civil War, with trains operating on both sides of the river, unlimited travel was available to Boscawen residents. George Fisher, a War Veteran, and Esther Coffin Fisher, his wife, left their Water Street Farm to go to Grand Army of the Republic reunions at the Weirs.

Tuesday, August 27, 1889 – Nice day. Men folks at work on the meadow. Hattie came in. Bought 5 gallons of Kerosene oil of John Huntress.

Wednesday, August 28, 1889 – Fair weather. George went to the Weirs early this morning. Went to the depot in Canterbury.

Thursday, August 29, 1889 -- Nice weather. The boys and I went to the Weirs on the early train, had a nice time. George came home with me.



Rainbow Bridge—Built—1857. Replaced by New Steel Bridge—1907.
Toll House—Built 1804. Burned—1920.

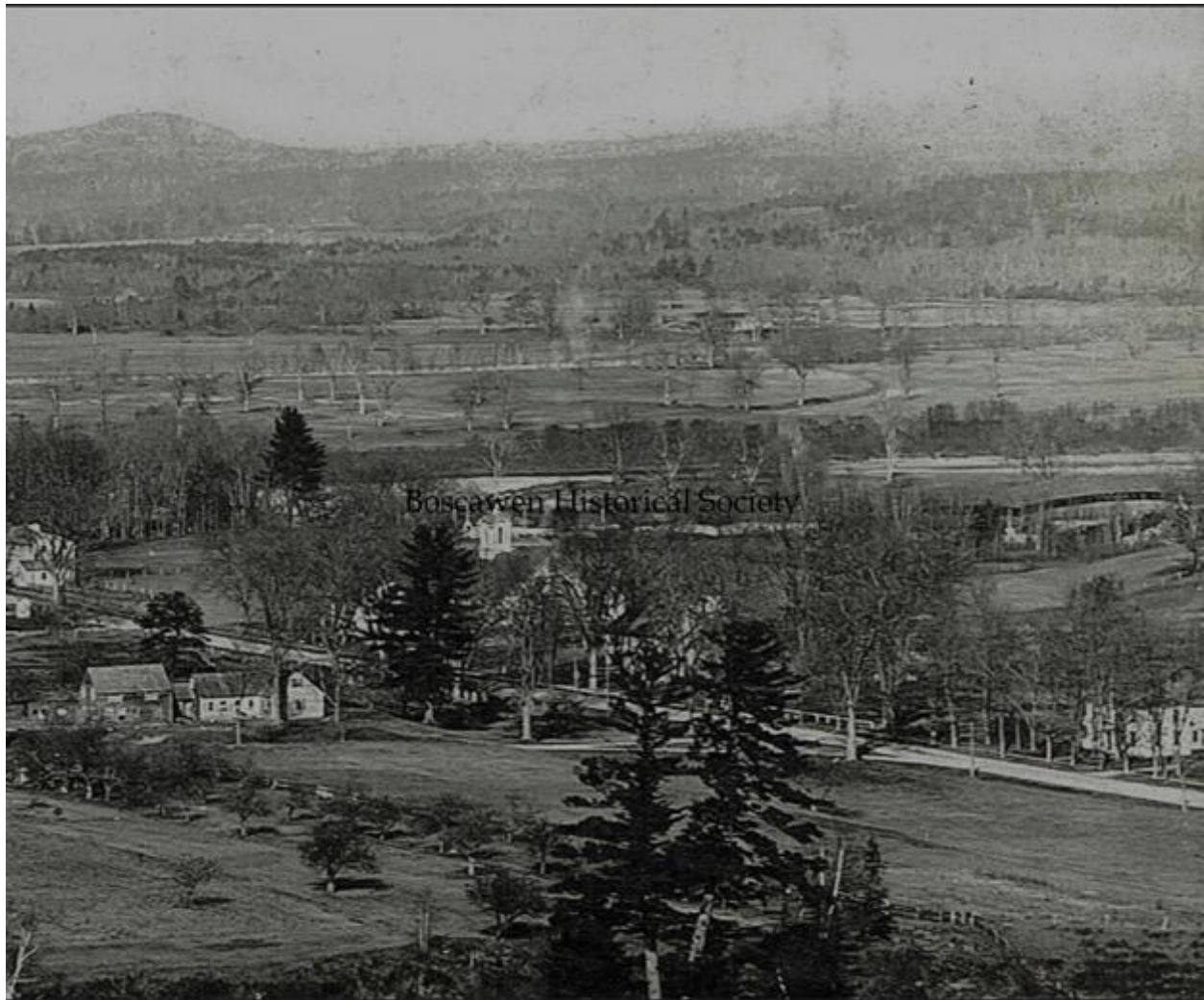
This post card caption does not tell the entire tale of the Toll House on the Canterbury Bridge on what is now Depot Street. The **first** bridge between **Boscawen Plain and Canterbury** exacted tolls until 1816, when the Proprietors allowed persons to pass free of charge, **at their own risk**, *“the bridge not being considered safe.”*



Rainbow Bridge between Depot Street, Boscawen and West Road, Canterbury New Hampshire

A two-span covered bridge of English Hump-back Design

The Piers were quarried in Concord, probably at the Swenson Granite Works, and were used for the 1907 Steel Bridge



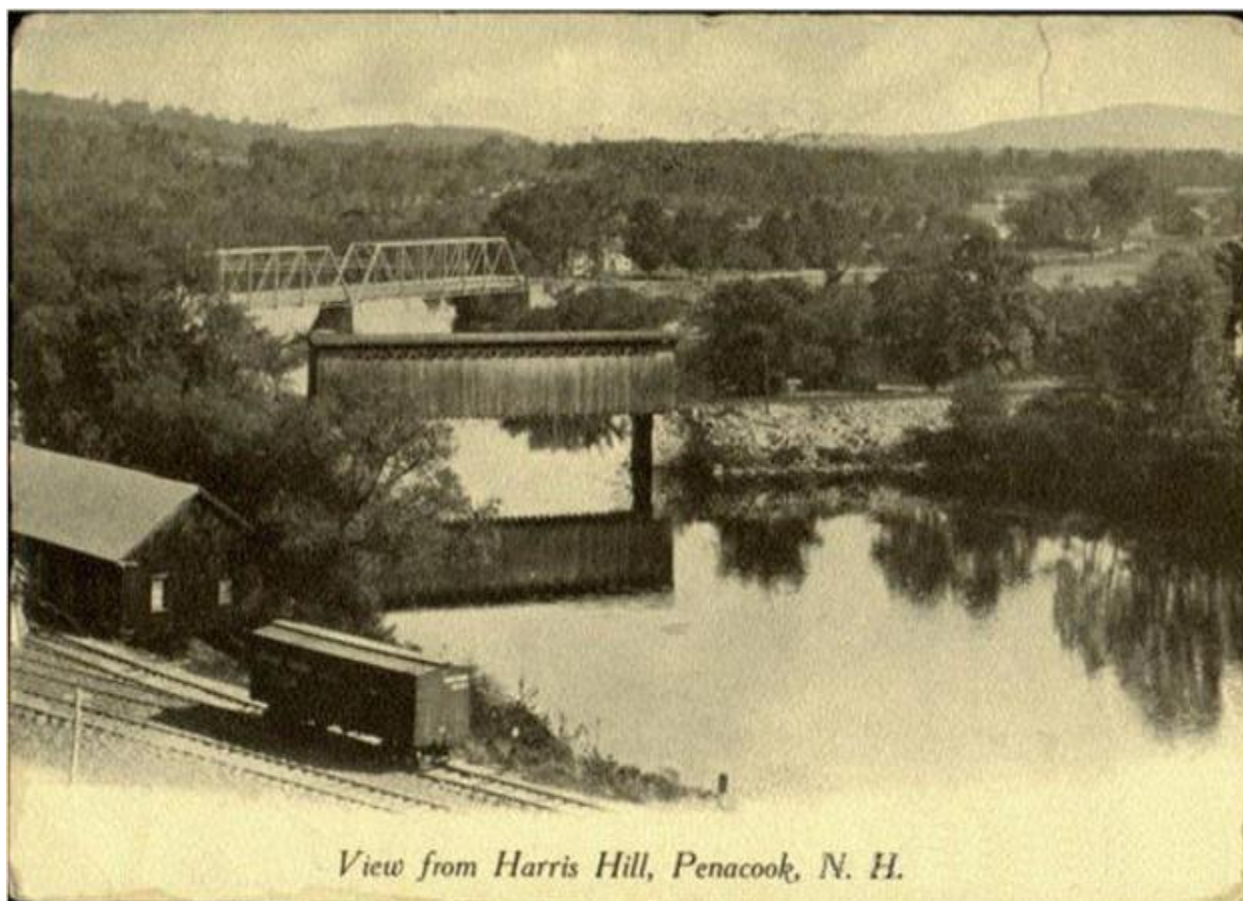
Center Right Rainbow Bridge from above the intersection of King and Queen Streets

The Fence along King Street is in front of the Plains Cemetery

The cupola on the barn is still a local landmark



Looking towards Rainbow Bridge in the distance from Windyghoul, the former Campfire Girls Cabin



The Boscawen Bridges at the Confluence

Bridges came in pairs in Boscawen – at approximately the same time, known individually as the Canterbury and Boscawen Bridge in 1802 and 1804 and the Steel Truss Bridges in the early 1900s. This was the view at the confluence of the Contoocook and Merrimack Rivers. A box railway bridge, destroyed in the flood of 1896 was rebuilt, enabling both trains and pedestrians to pass through to Dustin Island. The Steel Truss double bridge allowed travel along Route 4 from Portsmouth to East Concord to Boscawen to points north to Canada. That road joined Route 3 in front of what is now Highway View Farm.



THE STEEL BRIDGE BUILT 1907

The 1907 Steel Truss Boscawen-Canterbury Bridge replaced the wooden Rainbow Bridge. It rested on the stone abutments and piers built in 1857, that to this day show the exceptional masonry skills of that time. The consulting engineer, John W. Storrs, worked with the American Bridge Company for the steelwork fabrication, and the United Construction Company as the erection contractor for the all-riveted Parker Truss highway bridge.



Depot Street approached the bridge from Boscawen on the west side; West Road approached the bridge from Canterbury. Until the closing of the bridge in 1965 students from the adjacent part of Canterbury would often cross the bridges to attend school in Boscawen rather than going up the Canterbury hills to attend school in the village. The bridge sat in the Merrimack River Valley where the river is approximately 300 feet wide and twists and turns through ox-bows on fertile open agricultural low land, that shift the river flow from southwest to southeast.

The Jamie Welch house and Jamie Welch recreation area and park are adjacent to the approach to the former bridge. Just west of this on Depot Street is the former Station Master's house, and parking for the Northern Rail Trail, which extends from Hannah Dustin Island to Lebanon and White River for recreational use. In earlier days this area served as a staging and shipping destination for logs and lumber harvested from the Gerrish area and floated down to the canal at Sewells Falls.

The land on the east side of the former bridge is farmed again, and is a recreational area used for hiking, swimming (with occasional drownings on the length of the river), canoeing and kayaking, and fishing.



The bridge was 347 feet long and 20 feet wide, with a height of 25 feet. The two structural Parker truss spans were identical, each 170'3" in length. There are nine panels 18'11" wide on each Parker truss, built of riveted sections.



The "New" Bridge



The Merrimack River Watershed was formed by Glaciation melt circa 8,000 BCE, the original course went to Boston, but now goes to Newburyport, from whence came our original settlers. It is the fourth largest watershed in New England, flowing for 75 miles in New Hampshire and 58 miles in Massachusetts. The total watershed is approximately 5,000 square miles. It flows through a variety of terrains and climate conditions; temperatures vary widely; July is the hottest month, January the coldest. All these factors affect water uptake and the permeability of soil, along with the possibility of flooding. The river has tidal influence for 22 miles from Newburyport to Haverhill and was an early transportation route. Waterpower fueled the early settlements, mills, and the industrial revolution through its rivers, tributaries, and canals.

FLOODS

When flood waters recede, the damage left behind can be devastating and present many dangers. Floods along the Merrimack and Contoocook affected residents of Boscawen, regularly until the construction of the dams further upriver. Not only did bridges float away, with flooded adjacent land; damage to homes, mills, jobs, homes and loss of property and belongings hurt the community. Infrastructure was destroyed and disrupted. Additional disasters caused by fire and wind occurred at the time of the flooding; existing dams burst. Roads and rails washed away. People and animals died. Water-borne diseases and pollution affected many. Bridges on the Merrimack, Contoocook, Blackwater, and Warner rivers in Boscawen disrupted travel and commerce.



1936 Flood

One of the numerous spring spates, floods, or hurricanes that occurred at the 1907 Steel Truss Bridge prior to the establishment of flood control on the Pemigewasset River in Hill and Franklin Falls in 1941. This was the 1938 Spring Flood





Three types of floods affect the Merrimack River and its tributaries:

Fluvial: The water rises and overflows onto banks, shores, and adjacent land. Fluvial floods can swamp nearby areas and cause damage to dams and ditches, banks, and watercourses. (Excessive rain and/or melting snowpack)

Pluvial: Surface Water causes damage in drainage systems by obstructions, rain, and impervious surfaces; Flash Floods are caused by an intense, high-velocity torrent falling in a short time, often from an elevated terrain and/or a sudden release of water from upstream. Flash floods are dangerous and destructive with the force of water and debris swept away in the torrents (Spring spates, Heavy Rains, Ice Jams)

Storm Surge: High winds (and high tides). Low-lying land vulnerable, coastal flooding, loss of life and property. The magnitude of a surge is dependent on direction of the wind and the topography of the land.

Prior to the mid 20th Century building of USGS Flood Control dams on the Pemigewasset, Contoocook, and Blackwater Rivers the Merrimack River was extremely susceptible to flooding.

- Ice and debris jams are common during the winter and spring along rivers and streams in New England.
- Many of the record flood events along major rivers are the result of ice jams during spring melt-offs.
- Debris jams can occur at any time of year and have the same destructive force as an ice jam.
- As ice or debris moves downstream, it may get caught on any sort of obstruction to the water flow.
- When this occurs, water can be held back causing upstream flooding. When the dam finally breaks, flash flooding can occur downstream.

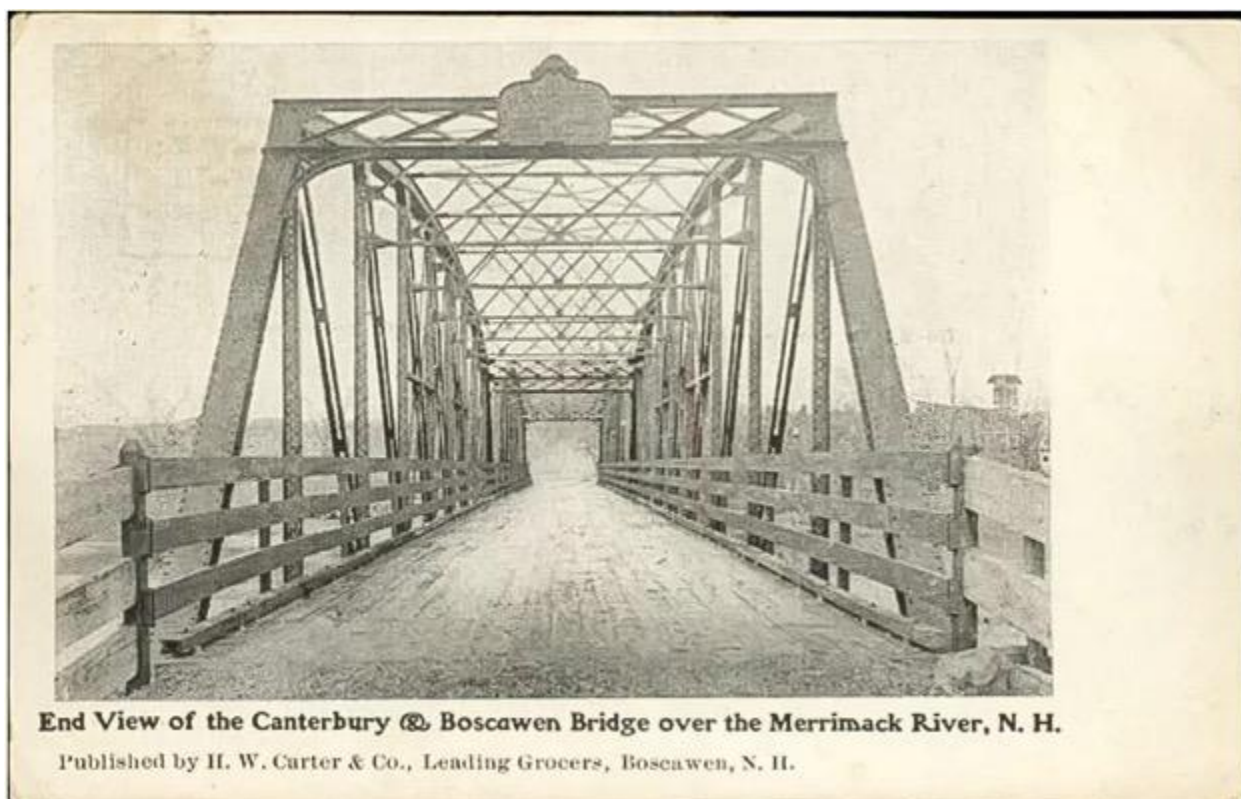




1927 Spring Spate



1936 Spring Spate

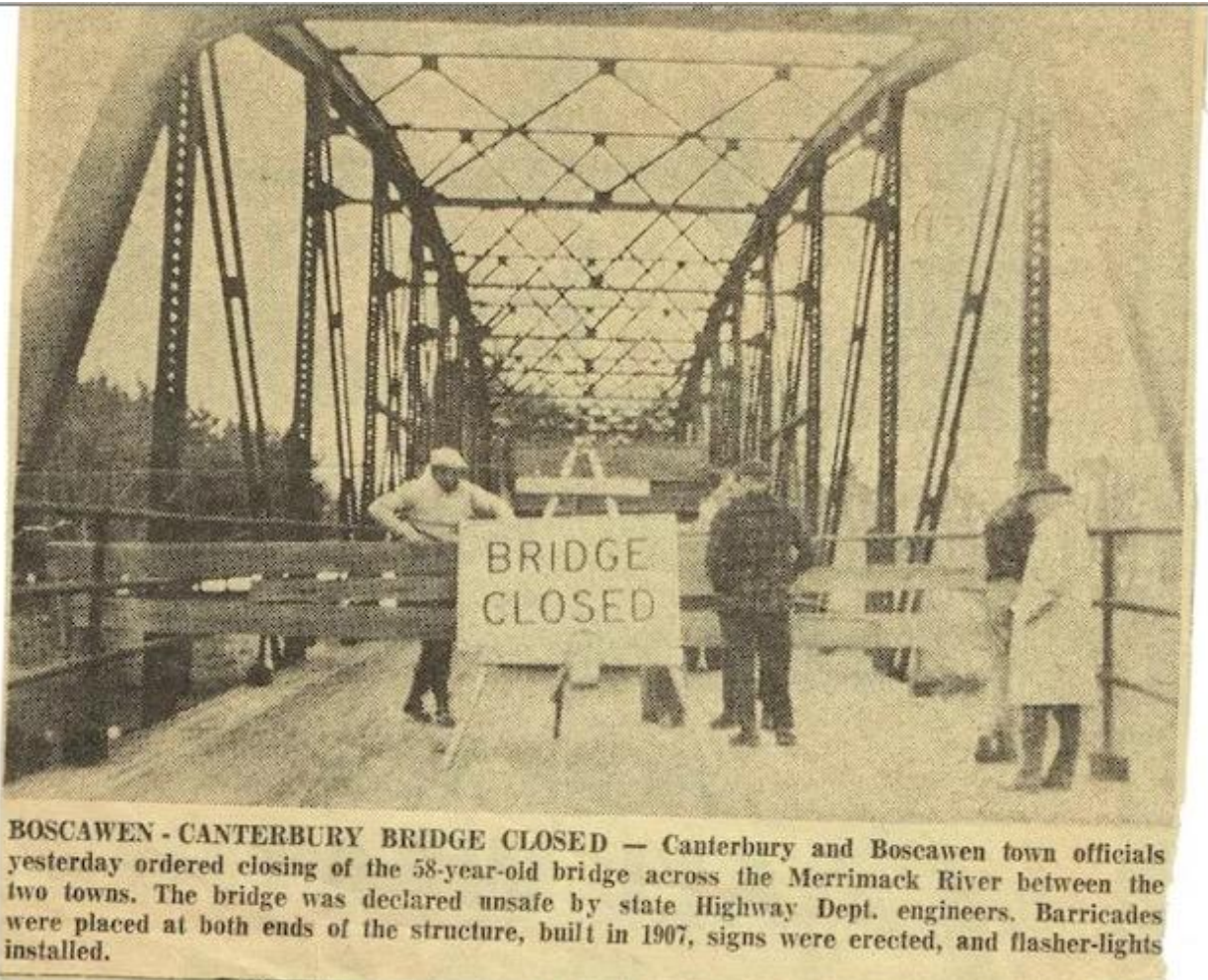


The steel truss Boscawen-Canterbury bridge over the Merrimack, built in 1907, deteriorated to the extent that the Selectmen closed it in 1965. The metal sign plaques are now respectively housed in the Boscawen and Canterbury Historical Societies.

Over many years bridge repairs failed to develop either the interest of both towns or the funding necessary to repair or replace the bridge. In 1965 the bridge was permanently closed and barricaded.

The plaque in the Boscawen Historical Society collection reads:

**THE
UNITED CONSTRUCTION CO.
CONTRACTORS, ALBANY, N.Y.
AMERICAN BRIDGE CO. OF N.Y. BUILDERS.
BOSCAWEN, NH
FRANK L. GERRISH, B. F. BUTLER, C. W. CARTER, SELECTMEN
JOHN W. STORRS, CONSULTING ENGINEER**



BOSCAWEN - CANTERBURY BRIDGE CLOSED — Canterbury and Boscawen town officials yesterday ordered closing of the 58-year-old bridge across the Merrimack River between the two towns. The bridge was declared unsafe by state Highway Dept. engineers. Barricades were placed at both ends of the structure, built in 1907, signs were erected, and flasher-lights installed.

This quote from the Canterbury history was just as true in 1965 as it had been in 1848 when it was made regarding the Canterbury Bridge.

“By this time the citizens of the section had lost much of their enthusiasm and for the time being, further bridge building was not attempted. Occasionally a small portion of the residents of the twin towns, urged by David M. Clough (of Canterbury) and Worcester Webster (of Boscawen), two leading citizens, would agitate the project of initiating a new toll bridge, but the towns as a whole could not agree upon the question, neither wanting the other a partner to the project. One of the towns attempted to construct the bridge, without obtaining the consent of its neighbor, and ordered the county commissioners to commence work on it. The other town took high-handed method in the matter, too, but stopped all proceedings by the serving of an injunction upon the commissioners. Litigation ensued, and continued for about two years. At the end of this time the construction of the present bridge was demanded by the county court and “Honest John” Abbot, mayor of Concord and the court’s commissioner in the matter, was instructed to see that each of the towns contributed its share toward the work and expense of construction. W. L. Childs of Concord had direct charge of the work.”

The 1940 Bridge Inventory Card prepared for the Boscawen-Canterbury Bridge by the NH Highway Department during its first statewide bridge inspection and inventory in 1940 included the following note: “general condition very poor.” The NHDOT bridge inspection records show that fifteen years later in 1955 emergency repairs were made by welding steel “patches” onto rusted-through members.

In 1958 the bridge was ordered closed by the Selectmen of both towns upon the recommendation of the State Highway Department. More temporary repairs were made shortly thereafter, and the bridge was reopened and posted at 3 tons.

In 1965 the bridge was permanently closed and barricaded.

It remained in place for nearly 50 years.

In 1995 an opinion was sought from the NHDOT regarding the possible rehabilitation of the bridge as a trail for pedestrian and snowmobile use only. The report found “both layers of floor beams severely rusted with numerous holes; trusses in extremely poor condition with lower chord section loss of 20-80%: several instances where 3 out of 4 lower chord angles completely rusted through.”

A 2009 engineering study examined the condition of the trusses and the rehabilitation options and costs, **concluding that removal was the only feasible option.**

The Canterbury Bridge was removed mid-November 2014.

There are no plans to replace it.

The middle pier remains.

Photos are from the Collection of the Boscawen Historical Society

Researched and Compiled by Elaine Clow, President

Boscawen Historical Society

January 2024

Please visit our website: boscawenhistoricalsociety.org

Visit our museum

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