

**CONNECTICUT RIVER BRIDGE  
04 WALPOLE – WESTMINSTER**

**NH Bridge ID: Walpole 132/062**

**CARRYING:** NH 123  
**PRESENT NAME:** Route 123 Bridge  
**DATE BUILT:** 1989  
**LAT/LONG:** 43.084217,-72.43372

**CROSSING CHRONOLOGY**

- 1807 First toll bridge established at site
- 1858 Second bridge
- 1870 Third bridge (Village Bridge), free
- 1910 Village Bridge burns, ferry put in service
- 1910 Fourth bridge, steel, erected
- 1988 Fifth and present bridge erected
- 1999 Deck rehabilitated

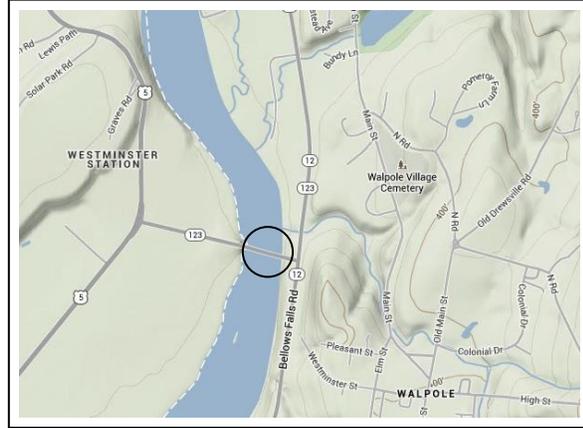


FIGURE 1: Route 123 Bridge, built 1988. Downstream side from New Hampshire shore (Historic Documentation Co. Inc. 2012)

**CROSSING HISTORY**

**First Bridge:** The first bridge at the site was built under the terms of a charter granted by the New Hampshire Legislature on June 7, 1807. The 540-foot long structure was built at a cost of \$5,852 and consisted of three spans carried on wood piers. Among the first proprietors of the bridge corporation were Walpole investors Josiah Bellows, Samuel Grant, Thomas C. Drew and Issac Reddington. Tolls were collected by Peter Casper from a small toll house erected at the east end of the bridge.

**Second Bridge:** The first bridge was replaced in 1858 with a timber lattice bridge erected on the existing piers and abutments, which were repaired and raised in elevation.

**Third Bridge:** In 1867 or 1868, the west end of the second bridge collapsed following undermining of the abutment. The proprietors offered to sell the bridge property and rights to the towns of Walpole and Westminster for the sum of \$3000, provided the towns erected a new bridge free of toll. After the plan failed to gather support, Colonel A. Herbert Bellows of Walpole assumed the offer and erected a new span, a covered bridge in 1870, providing the first free bridge to join Cheshire County, New Hampshire and Windham County, Vermont. By 1906 the bridge had been rebuilt and repaired numerous times, with a cost to Walpole alone exceeding \$15,000.

On April 1, 1910 the bridge was set afire by an arsonist. It collapsed into the river and the center and western spans were carried down river while the eastern span caught on the bank, burning for 48 hours. Loss of the bridge severed telephone and electrical service across the river.

**Fourth Bridge:** In April and May 1910 a joint town bridge committee was convened to decide on a plan for a new bridge to replace the bridge destroyed by fire. In May a temporary ferry was put into service about 100 yards upstream that operated until the new bridge opened on January 24, 1911. The contract for the design of the bridge was awarded to J.R. Worcester & Co. of Boston. Joseph R. Worcester, one of the leading bridge engineers in the country, had completed the design of the innovative and monumental North Walpole- to Bellows Falls Steel Arch bridge over the Connecticut River in 1905.

Worcester again saw the opportunity for a highly creative and cost effective design, employing the existing stone piers of the preceding bridge that were still standing sound. To efficiently span the nearly 160-foot distance between the two piers for the center span, he cantilevered the side spans roughly 23 feet beyond the piers and hung the center span, now reduced to 114 feet, from the cantilevered ends on a series of massive bolts. This unique design attracted the attention of *Engineering News-Record*, the leading engineering journal of the day, which ran an article on the bridge.

The contract for construction of the bridge was awarded to Walsh's Steam Boiler Works of Holyoke, Massachusetts, following their low bid of \$25,978. Construction began August 4, 1910 with the erection of derricks on each side of the river. The new bridge opened for traffic January 24, 1911. Various repairs were made over the years to the bridge, including realignment on its bearings after being battered loose by the 1927 flood. In 1933 an entirely new and stronger concrete deck system was installed. The bridge was closed to traffic on April 14, 1987, after seventy-six years of service.

**Fifth Bridge:** The preceding bridge's piers and abutments were removed and new concrete ones constructed in their place. The present bridge is a welded plate girder deck bridge with a total length of 468 feet, consisting of three simple spans, two 152' long and one at 158'-8" in length. The bridge was built 1988 to 1989 by E.W. Swett, Inc., of Concord, New Hampshire.

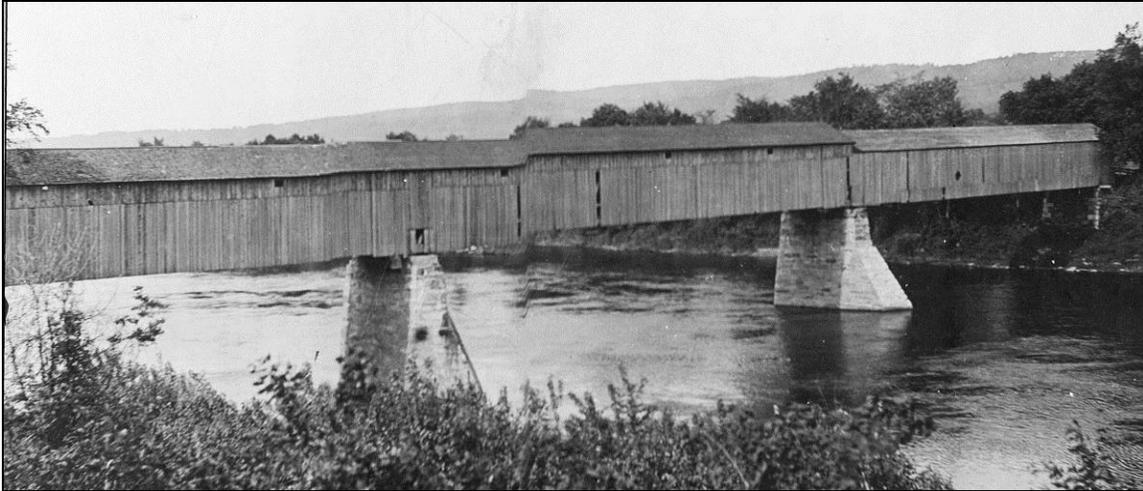


FIGURE 2: Walpole Village Covered Bridge, built 1870, destroyed by fire in 1910 (Cheshire County Historical Society).



FIGURE 3: Walpole Village Bridge (steel girder), downstream elevation from Walpole (NHDOT 1950).

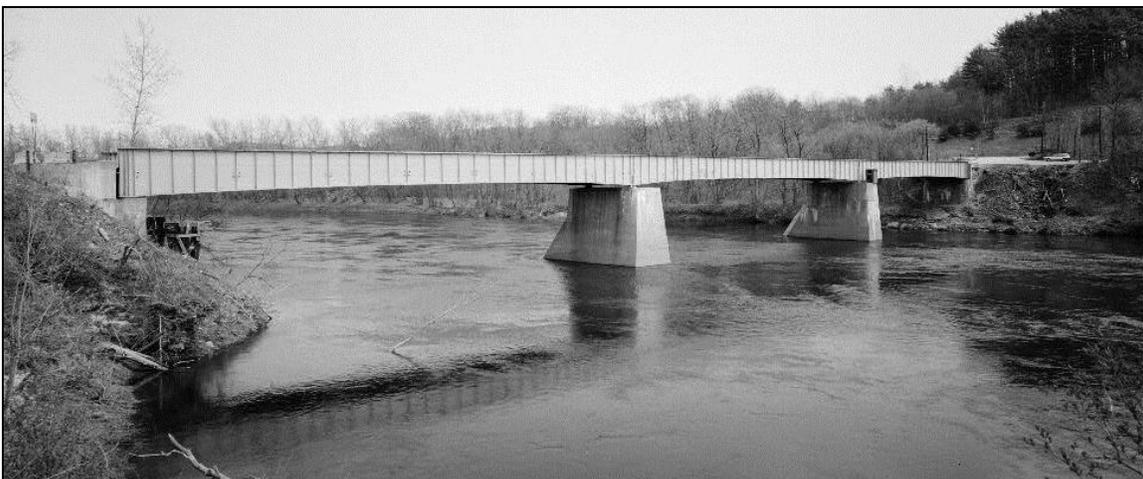


FIGURE 4: Walpole Village Bridge, steel girder built 1910, downstream side from Vermont (HAER 1988).

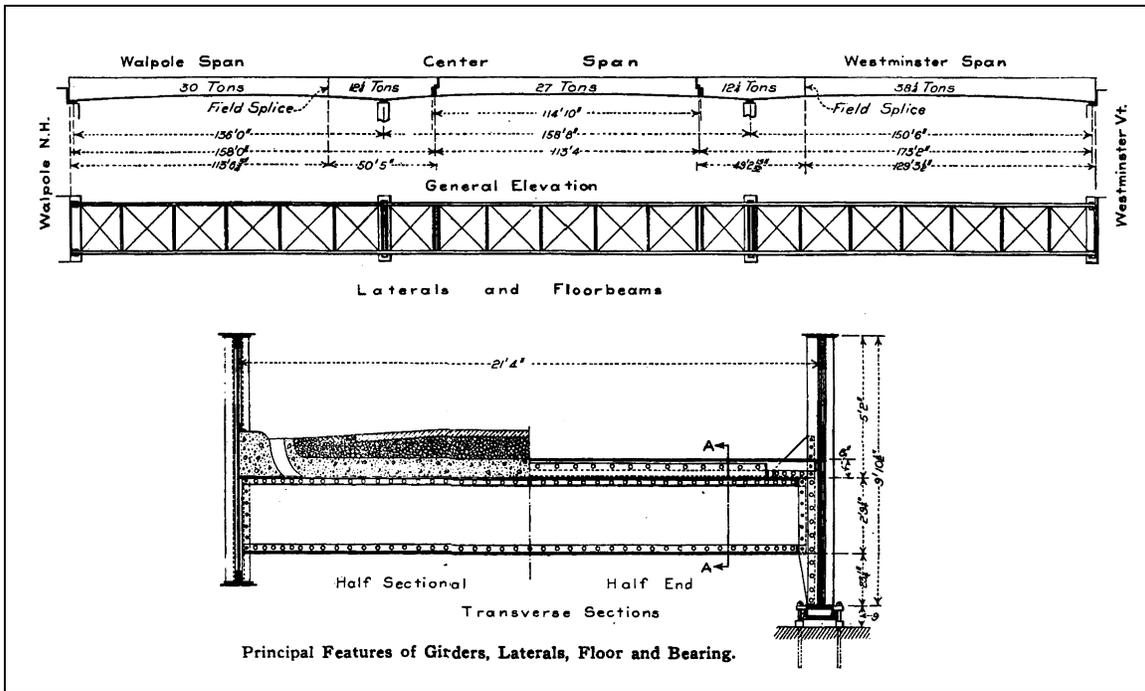


FIGURE 5: Elevation, plan & section drawings of Walpole Village Bridge (1910); the innovative engineering features of the bridge merited an article on the bridge entitled "The Walpole Bridge," in the leading engineering journal of the day (*Engineering News-Record* 1911).

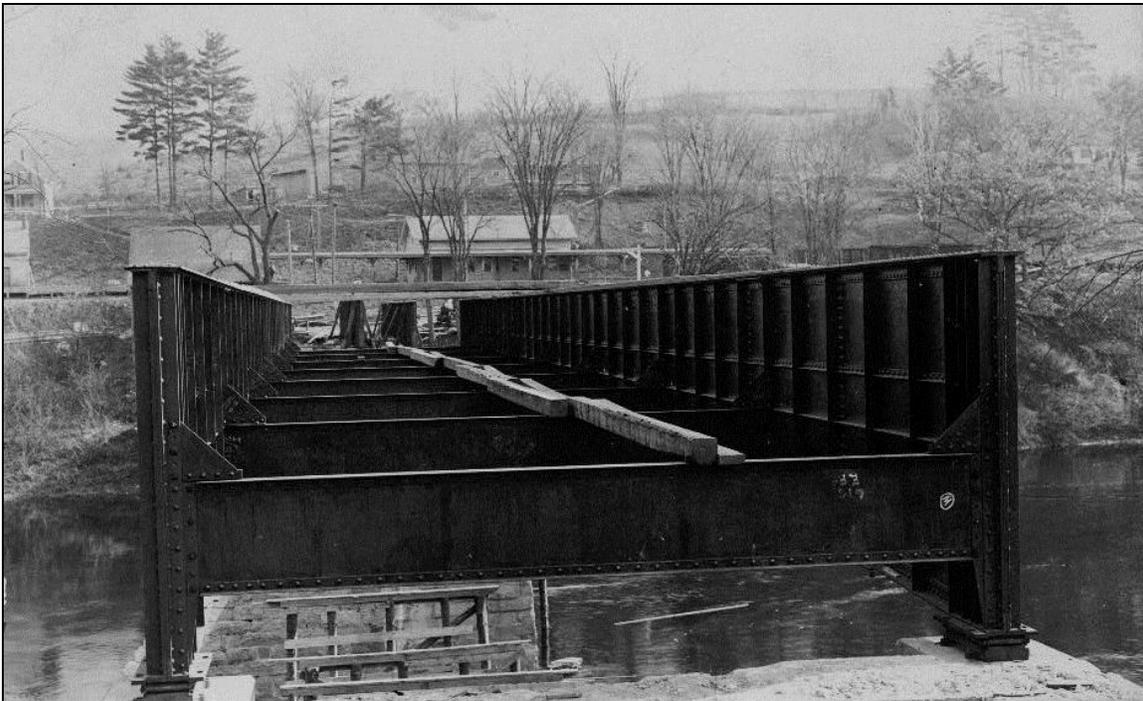


FIGURE 6: Walpole Village Bridge (steel girder), under construction, ca. November 1910; note the buildings visible in the distance on the Walpole bank, including the railroad station, at center, general store, at left, and former toll house, far left, all no longer standing (HAER 1988).



FIGURE 7: Walpole Village Bridge (steel girder), built 1910; Walpole approach to bridge in 1952, with sign on building reading "Bridge Feed & Grain Co. Walpole N.H." (NHDOT 1952).

### **Bibliography**

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