

The 14th Annual *Yesterday & Today* 2024

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THE CHESHIRE COVERED BRIDGE BY RON PATCH

Today, many of us refer to the Cheshire Bridge, which connects Springfield to Charlestown, as “The Toll Bridge.” But what do we know about its history? Below is what I learned.

In 1804, the Cheshire Bridge Corporation was granted a charter to build a bridge at this location. This wooden bridge was completed in 1806. It was destroyed by the freshet of 1831. One source I used says it was 1833. This bridge was built by Isaac Fisher of Charlestown, and later Springfield.

The second bridge was built in 1831-1833. An Englishman by the name of Captain Frederick Marryat came to this country in the 1830s and traveled around. Marryat wrote a book of his travels in 1839, “A Diary of America.” He describes Charlestown, N.H., as a pretty village, and comments how residents of this town don’t like taxes.

The turnpike that began at the Cheshire Bridge angered Charlestown residents. Reminiscent of the Boston Tea

Party, one evening the tollhouse was destroyed. A group of men with a couple teams of horses, with aid of a hawser (a strong rope or cable), hooked the teams to the tollhouse and dragged it down to the river. It was sent down the river along with the gate and the toll board.

The contractors for the bridge were Isaac Damons and Lyman Kingsley of Northampton, Mass. Isaac Silsby, a local mason, supervised the construction of the substructure. This bridge was replaced in 1896-1897 with the first steel bridge.

FIRST STEEL BRIDGE

The first steel bridge was three spans and known as a Pratt truss. This bridge carried the electric railroad, as well as horse-drawn vehicles. The Berlin Iron Bridge Company of Berlin, Conn., was the contractor. This bridge used the same stone piers and abutments as the previous bridge.

SECOND STEEL BRIDGE

The second and current steel bridge

was built in 1930 by the McClintic-Marshall Company of Pittsburg, Pa. This bridge is also a three-span Pratt truss, 489 feet long.

Sources for this article were supplied by the Charlestown Historical Society and the Springfield Art & Historical Society.

RUNNING THE BRIDGE

I was about 13 when my father Arnold told me about his experience with the toll bridge. Many will remember paying a toll on the Charlestown side. It cost 10 cents in my father’s time, but 25 cents in my time.

It was about 1937, my father was out late one night with two of his buddies. Dad told me about “running the bridge.” He broke out in a broad smile as he described it. “As I approached the bridge I gained speed. I pushed the headlight control in as I neared the tollbooth and gunned it! There was a dim light in the booth with a man to take tolls. We flew by the booth, burst out laughing, and

opened another beer.” He made it sound so exciting.

It was 1970. I was driving my 1966 Chevelle. I had a case of beer on the back seat (the drinking age was 21; I was 18), and two girls in the front seat. It was late at night, when the bridge appeared. I increased speed, turned the headlights off, and flew across the bridge, past the tollbooth. This was exciting until I made it to the center of Charlestown, and was pulled over by the Charlestown Police.

The girls called their parents, who came and picked them up. I called Arnold for a brief conversation. Arnold didn’t like being woken up. He knew I was in trouble. “Where are you?” he asked. “I’m at the police station in Charlestown,” I said. “What did you do?” was his next question. I proudly told him, “I ran the toll bridge like you did!”

“You damn fool,” he said. “I went from New Hampshire to Vermont. You can stay where you are.” The next morning my mother came and bailed me out.



Restaurant at Chester Town Hall.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY DANNY CLEMONS



Dr. G.H. Buxton's house in Proctorsville.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY DANNY CLEMONS



The Elms in Charlestown.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY RON PATCH



The Starlite Room provided a space for public dancing in Springfield.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY SPRINGFIELD ART & HISTORICAL SOCIETY



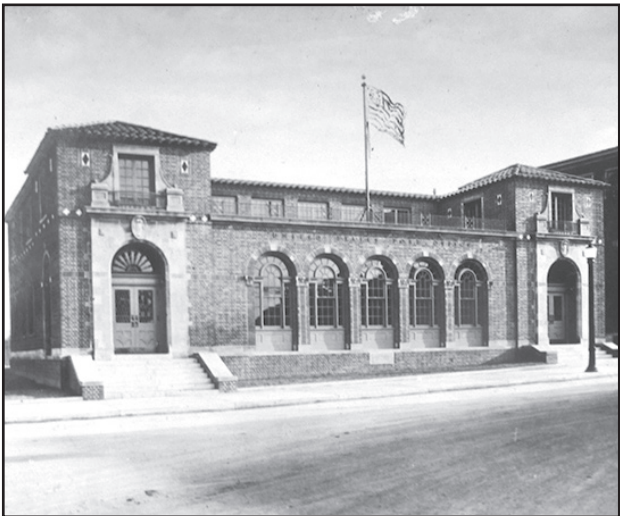
The Gordon Snide Farm, circa 1946-1957. Now it is part of the North Springfield flood control area.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY WEATHERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Thank You

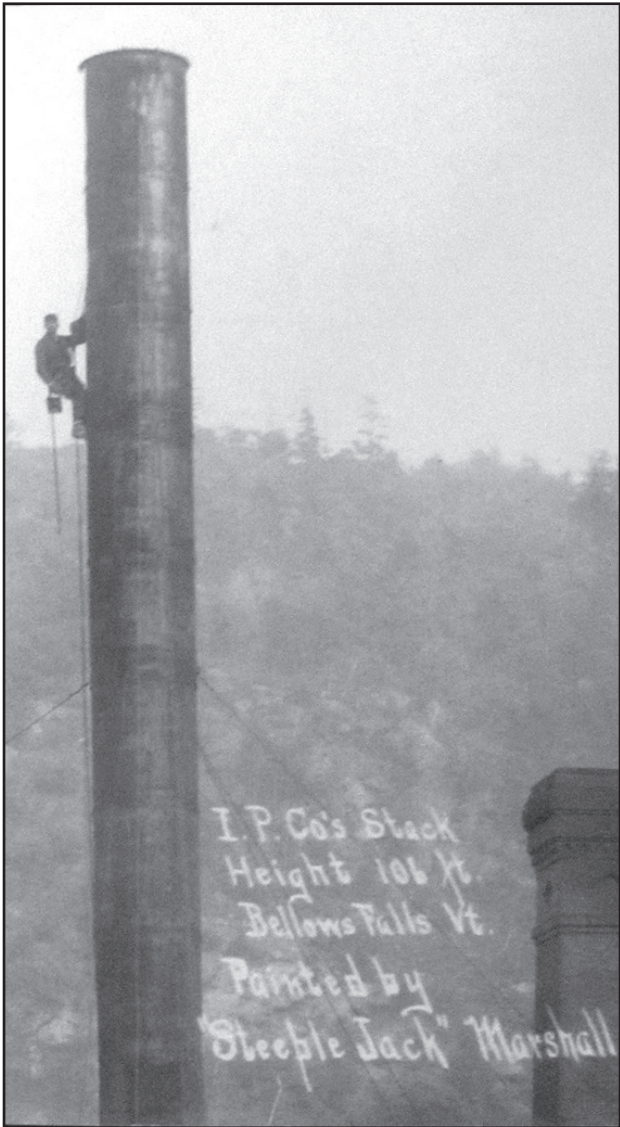
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The new Bellows Falls Post Office.
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Louis Marshall on the International Paper smokestack in Bellows Falls.
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The Parsonage in Weston.

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Gathering sap on the Patch farm in Mount Holly.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY RON PATCH



A new store opening in the Gray Block, later renamed Star Hotel, and now the site of the Brown-Fuller Memorial Park in Bellows Falls.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY BELLOWS FALLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



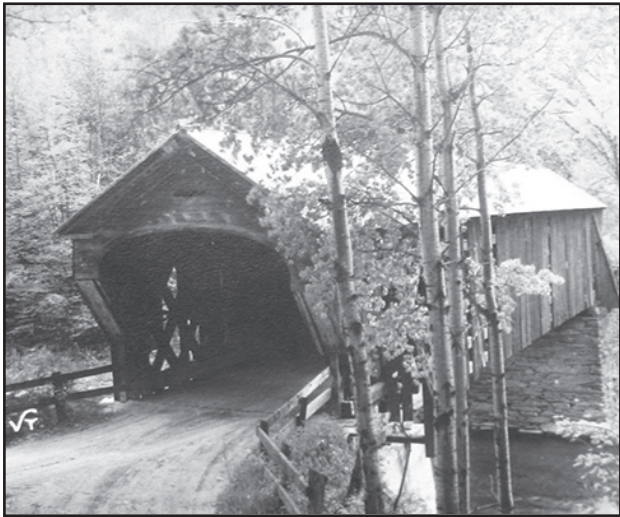
French monument in Westminster.

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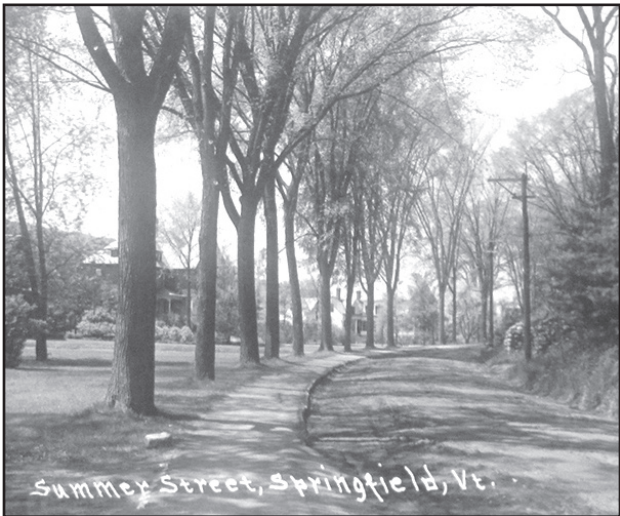
The Gassetts Train Station.

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Amsden covered bridge.

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Summer Street in Springfield, circa 1915.

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The Ox Bow, what is now the Springfield Shopping Plaza.

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The Central Hotel and Richards Market, circa 1900, now the site of Windham Antiques in Bellows Falls.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY BELLOWS FALLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Walker Covered Bridge in Grafton.

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The Delbert Edson Home, former site of Baba Louis in Chester.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Painting of Inn Victoria in Chester by Debra Webster Irons.

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Crowley Cheese Factory in Mount Holly. By the late 1920s, the automobile replaced the horse-drawn wagon for the 80-pound milk cans.

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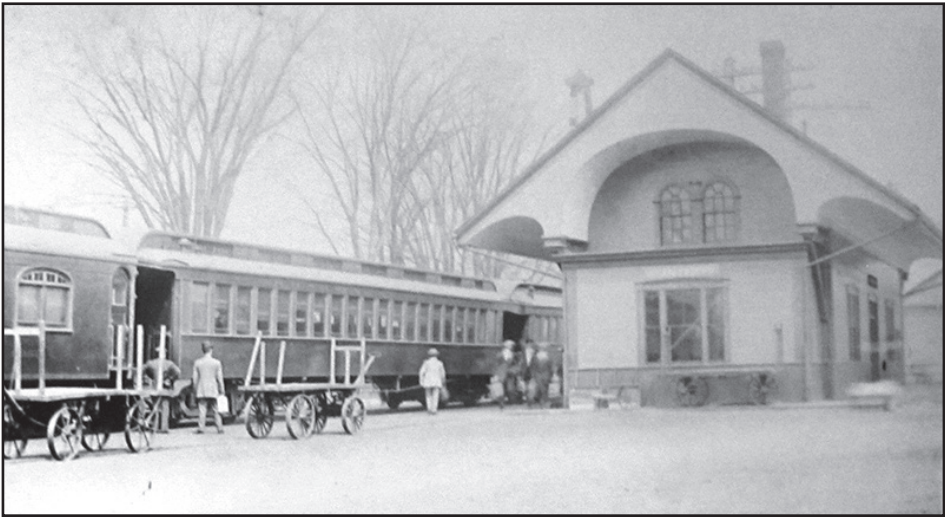
The Ludlow Schoolhouse, now houses Black River Valley Senior Center and The Vermont Journal.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY RON PATCH



A phone line is instaled at the Coolidge farm in Plymouth.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY DANNY CLEMONS



Main Street in Perkinsville.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY RON PATCH



The Charlestown Train Station.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY RON PATCH



Echo Lake Inn in Tyson.
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The Square in Proctorsville.
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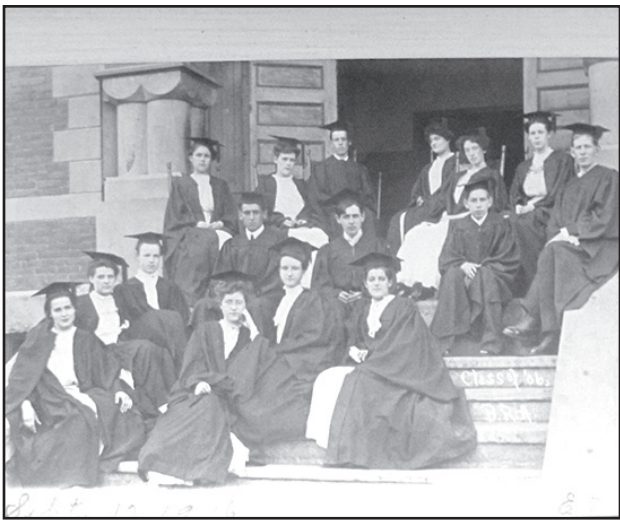
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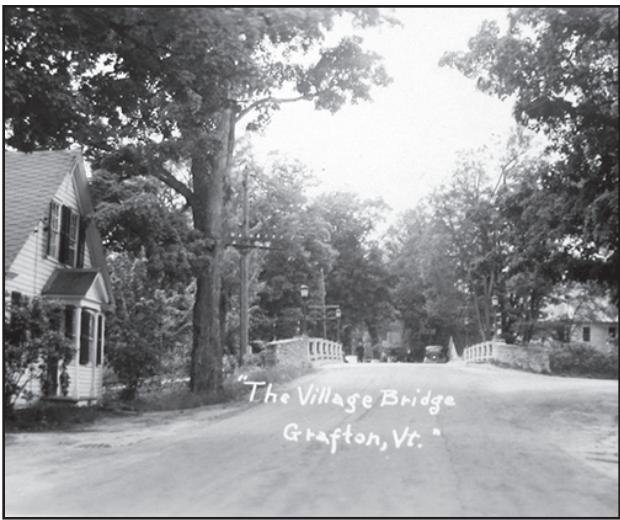
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Trebo School children at Trebo School in Chester.
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1906 Black River Academy grads in Ludlow.
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The Village Bridge in Grafton.
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Bartonsville store (left) with hotel next door. The hotel is now gone. The brick store still stands, modified.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY DANNY CLEMONS



A futuristic drawing of Chester's Green.
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY RON PATCH



Beautiful view of the Weston Mill Dam.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Lowell Lake Stage, circa 1890, in Lodonderry.
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The Plymouth store.
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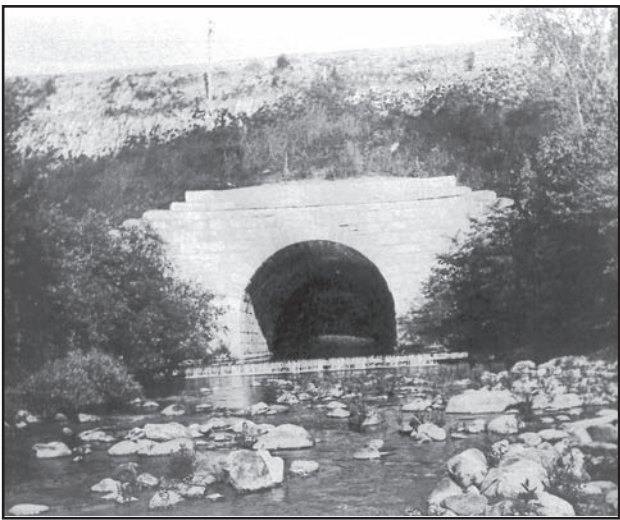
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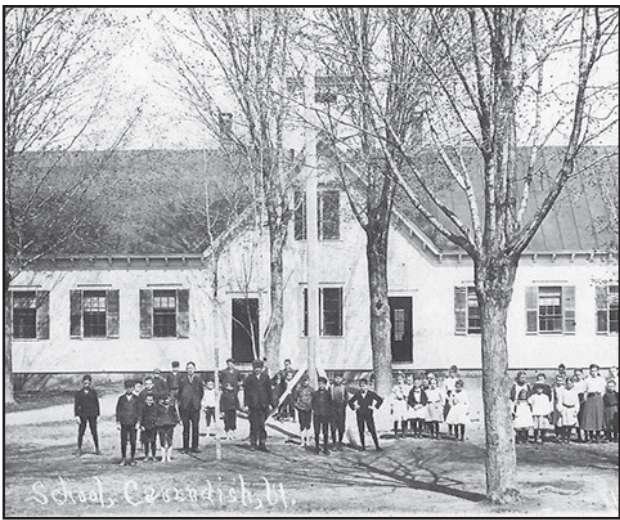
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The culvert under the railroad in North Charlestown.
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The Grist Mill in Weston.
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The Proctorsville school.
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Holton tobacco scene in Westminster.
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The Ludlow House.
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Herb Harris Sawmill in Weathersfield.
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A view of Bellows Falls in February 1927 showing the construction of the new town hall in center and new high school in upper left.
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James White place in Windham.
PHOTO BY HARRY CHAPMAN

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