



NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

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NEWPORT PROTECTS RARE COVERED RAILROAD BRIDGES

The Division of Historical Resources, the Town of Newport, and the Newport Historical Society have agreed to combine two pending grants to safeguard a pair of rare covered railroad bridges from fire.

Wright's Bridge (1906) and Pier Bridge (1907), two of the eight covered railroad bridges remaining in the world, span the Sugar River in West Newport. Pier Bridge is the longest surviving covered railroad bridge, having a total length of 217 feet. Wright's Bridge is the only surviving double lattice railroad bridge that incorporates laminated wooden arches between its trusses. Like DHR's own Contoocook Covered Bridge in Hopkinton, Wright's and Pier Bridges stand on the right-of-way of the former Concord and Claremont Railroad.



Pier Covered Railroad Bridge (1907) over the Sugar River, Newport, N. H. (Photograph by James. L. Garvin)

Both are used as trail crossings by the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development.

The Town of Newport was awarded a \$500,000 federal Transportation Enhancement (TE) grant for preservation work on Pier Bridge in 1999.



Wright's Covered Railroad Bridge (1906), Newport, N. H. (Photograph by James L. Garvin)

When the town appeared to be unable to raise the required 20% cash match of \$100,000 to activate this grant, DHR acted to secure its own grant to protect the two spans from fire. In March 2006, DHR was awarded a Transportation Enhancement grant of \$111,392 for installation of fire detection and suppression systems in both bridges.

In the spring of 2006, the Newport Historical Society stepped forward with a pledge to raise the matching funds needed to activate the long-dormant Newport grant. Realizing that the two TE grants could bring a total of over \$600,000 to the protection of the pair of bridges, DHR offered to merge its grant with the Newport grant, placing both under the administration of the Town of Newport.

Since making that offer, DHR has supported efforts by the Newport Historical Society to raise its needed \$100,000

match. State architectural historian Jim Garvin participated in the production of a fund-raising video on the bridge, as did president David W. Wright of the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges, preservation engineer David C. Fischetti of North Carolina, and noted covered bridge builder Arnold M. Graton, Sr.

By November, 2007, the Newport Historical Society was able to announce, "We did it!--\$100,000 goal exceeded." By the end of December, in fact, the Society had raised \$142,000 to match the two merged Transportation Enhancement grants.

The Society's success at fundraising ensures that some \$650,000 will be available to protect these two engineering landmarks from fire.

Pier and Wright's Bridges were built after the Boston & Maine Railroad absorbed the original Concord and Claremont line in 1887. These bridges reflect the B&M's specialization in building wooden bridges long after most other railroads had turned completely to steel. B&M engineer Jonathan Parker Snow (1848-1933), an expert in steel design, nevertheless advocated the use of wooden bridges for the B&M's branch lines, which were served by smaller and

lighter locomotives. "The building of such bridges is a live business on the Boston and Maine Railroad," Snow wrote in 1895, citing virtues of economy, strength, and resilience in such bridges.

*James L. Garvin
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