

## **Covered bridge gone for now, but it'll be back**

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PEPPERELL -- Just four months after the groundbreaking to replace the landmark covered bridge, the old structure is gone, leaving just the twin stone piers and the newly constructed aluminum pedestrian-utility bridge in its place.

Swollen by recent rain, the current foams white as it rushes past the old piers, hiding the first layers of 350 cubic feet of white sandbags. The bags will become a cofferdam to contain the rubble when the piers are taken down.

Department of Public Works Director Robert Lee, who was involved in choosing the type of granite for the piers, said the new ones will be real granite, not look-alike rock.

Final demolition and the opening of the temporary pedestrian-utility bridge was behind the schedule presented in January. However, Lee said that once the cofferdams are installed and functioning, work on the piers and abutments will take place.

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Lee said plans are unchanged regarding the design and manufacture of the new covered bridge, which will be done off-site, probably in upstate New York.

The bridge will be disassembled, shipped and reassembled at the river, probably next summer.

The project began May 5, with a ceremony that ended 10 years of up-and-down battles over appropriations and design.

State Transportation Secretary Bernard Cohen said the \$7.97 million project -- almost 40 times the cost of the original bridge built in pre-Revolutionary days that led to the separation of Pepperell from West Groton -- is one of the first beneficiaries of a \$3.5 billion bond bill authorized in 2007 and signed by Gov. Deval Patrick in mid-April.

Mass. Highway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky said Pepperell's bridge is special among the state's 4,400 bridges because it is the only wooden one in eastern Massachusetts.

Local resident David Pease has created a Web site to track progress ([www.pepperellinfo.net/coveredbridge](http://www.pepperellinfo.net/coveredbridge)) and to display his photographs of the project's progress.

S&R Construction of Lowell was awarded the bid for the bridge work on Aug. 28.

Beginning in March, Mass. Highway, monitoring structural capabilities, decided the bridge could no longer carry traffic safely, and it was closed to vehicular traffic on April 7.

Steel for the pedestrian bridge began arriving two weeks after the groundbreaking ceremony. The first cement pour of abutments for the temporary bridge took place June 12. The narrow bridge was assembled at the site and slid out over the river to be installed.

Demolition of the 45-year-old bridge began July 25.

According to the Historical Society, the bridge is the third at the spot, first linking north and south sections of East Pepperell about 1740.

The original structure, Jewett's Bridge, is as prominent in local Revolutionary War history as Lexington's Battle Green. Local militia Capt. Prudence Wright, a 35-year-old mother of six, led patriotic Pepperell women in waylaying two couriers carrying tactical information for the British. One was her brother, Samuel, a Tory, and the other was Samuel Whiting.

The minutemen of Pepperell, Groton and Hollis, N.H., had responded to the call to arms April 19, 1775, at Lexington and Concord, and later at Bunker Hill.

Seventy years later, in 1845, Town Meeting voted to build a new covered bridge "like the one in Hollis placed over the Nashua River called Runnell's Bridge," according to town clerk records.

Capt. Levi Parker was chosen to build the bridge for \$1,200, provided he was given the old bridge. It eventually cost \$2,200 to build.

Later records indicate that the Bridge Committee considered the construction "inferior to the Hollis bridge," except for the roof, which was all chestnut wood. Parker was also required to warranty the bridge for 10 years, for which he was paid \$1 per year.

The now-demolished bridge, named for state Rep. Chester Waterous, was dedicated Nov. 4, 1963, after allegations of "trickery" similar to the problems in 1845 had delayed the re-opening for five years.

