

Comstock Covered Bridge

Spanning the Salmon River between the towns of Colchester and East Hampton, Connecticut, the Comstock Covered Bridge is one of only three historic covered bridges remaining in Connecticut. The first bridge at this location was built in the 1700s, and as wooden



bridges generally had a life span of 20 to 30 years, it is likely that the earlier bridge was rebuilt several times before the present bridge was constructed. The original parts of the bridge date from 1873 when the Town of Colchester voted for “the rebuilding of Comstock’s Bridge, with such width of span as shall judge will be sufficient to take the water and ice through.” With a

span of 80 feet, the bridge was a substantial town-highway project for the time, costing \$3,958.59, a large sum in an age when common laborers were paid a dollar a day. The design chosen for the bridge, the Howe truss, was invented by William Howe (1803-1952), a carpenter-builder from Warren, Massachusetts. Howe patented his design in 1840 and took out another patent covering refinements in 1850. The key feature of the Howe truss was the use of iron tie rods as tension members with wooden timbers. This bridge served the public for almost 60 years before being replaced in 1932 by a concrete bridge just downstream.

Shortly thereafter, the two towns transferred the bridge to the State of Connecticut as part of the Salmon River State Forest. The bridge received a major overhaul in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, was repaired again in the early 1970s, and a third program of rehabilitation was undertaken in 2011. Despite the rehabilitations, it still retains its integrity of location,



design, setting, feeling, and association. AHS historian Bruce Clouette prepared the National Register of Historic Places documentation of the bridge, advised on historically sympathetic rehabilitation, and prepared an article for the *Society for Industrial Archaeology* newsletter (<http://nec-sia.org/newletters/2012-2.pdf>).