

# 82 Stark Covered Bridge

Northside Road, Groveton, New Hampshire

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The historic and picturesque Stark Covered Bridge was constructed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century; some sources of information cite the year of construction as 1857, while other sources cite 1862. The Stark Bridge is an important landmark in New Hampshire. It is one of the state's best-known and most photographed covered bridges, and is one of the few remaining examples of the Paddleford truss bridge; a style developed by Peter Paddleford of Littleton, New Hampshire. The Paddleford truss, found only in New England, is an unpatented regional variant of the Long truss style that was originally developed by Stephen H. Long. The Stark Bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

This 138 foot long bridge spans the upper Ammonoosuc River, and links New Hampshire Route 110 and the local Northside Road. Interestingly, there was once a floating bridge located just upriver from the current location of the Stark Covered Bridge; it was replaced upon completion of the Stark Bridge

In 1890, spring flooding tore the center pier away and carried the bridge downstream where it, luckily, became caught on some debris and was saved from washing further downstream or complete destruction. Teams of oxen and men hauled the bridge back upstream and positioned it on new stone abutments. Laminated arches were added to strengthen the Bridge which eliminated the need for a center pier, considered to be dangerous during flooding events. In 1938, the arches were repaired, but soon began to sag, in 1946, a wooden center pier was introduced.



In the 1950s, the residents of Stark voted to replace the covered bridge with a new steel bridge. However, the outcry from artists and covered bridge enthusiasts was so strong, instead of being demolished; it was ultimately restored in 1954, with the help of state funds. The wooden center pier was replaced with one made of concrete, the arches were

removed, the roof was replaced, and four concealed steel beam stringers were used to increase the live load capacity of the bridge to 15 tons.

During the early 1980s, a new roof was installed on the Stark bridge at a cost of \$18,750, and the next year \$35,500 was spent to repair the underside of the bridge. Most recently, in 2011, the Town of Stark received a \$904,000 federal National Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Program grant as part of a \$1.1 million effort to renovate the Stark Bridge. It is anticipated that the renovation project will be completed by fall of 2013.

**Sources:**

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