

Kennebec Bridges

FREE BRIDGE

AT LAST!



The Reporter Bird Although Small, Screams his Lustiest over the Happy Event.

The Cannon Booms Free Bridge

The Bells Peal Out their Cheeriest Free Bridge

Today all Gardiner and Pittston rejoice in the banishment of this relic of the olden time

WHOOOP 'ER UP!

The necessary papers for the freeing of the Gardiner & Pittston Bridge were passed yesterday afternoon at 2.30 o'clock, between the Committee appointed by the City Government on the part of this city, and the Selectmen of Pittston, and Weston Lewis, Esq., on the part of the Bridge stockholders. The two communities can now have free intercourse, and the result of this long-desired object cannot fail to prove a long and strong step in the direction of progress and prosperity of our city and the neighboring village across the water. Let everybody rejoice who has the interest of our city at heart.
January 1, 1887

Just three bridges have spanned the Kennebec River to Gardiner over the last 150 years. This photograph shows the first 1853 covered bridge with a steel swing section at its center. Initially a toll bridge, the 899-foot-long structure between Pittston (now Randolph) and Gardiner was declared a free bridge in 1887. The "Happy Event" was reported in the local paper (left).



Covered bridge

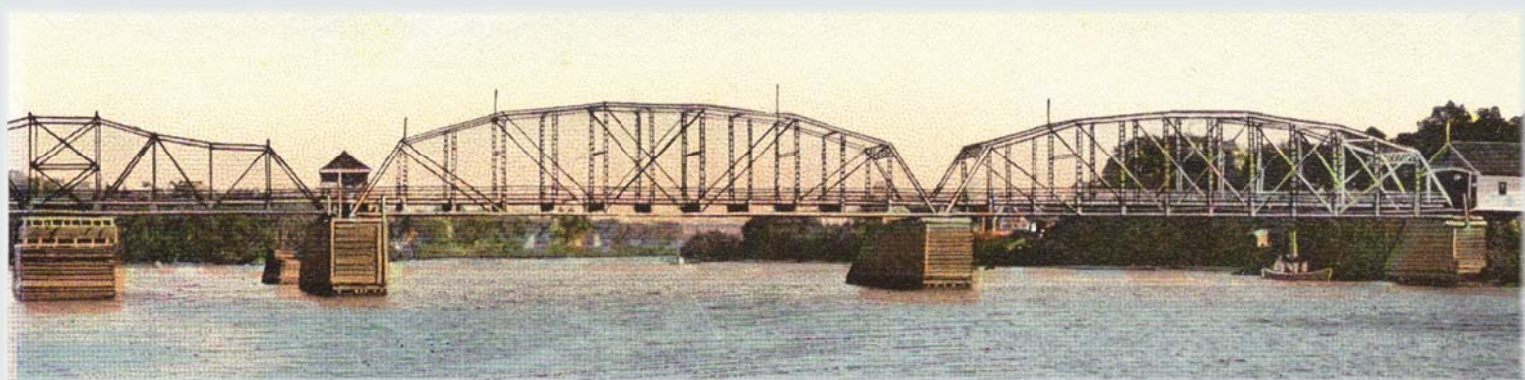
A vessel, the Della Collins, passes through the covered bridge's turning draw. The swinging section allowed vessels to pass upriver to Hallowell and Augusta. A massive flood destroyed this bridge in 1896, and a steel bridge (below) was built to replace it.



The covered bridge with the steel turning draw open



A horse-drawn wagon passes the gatekeeper's house on the new steel bridge, in the early 1900s.



Some residents of Randolph were dismayed when this bridge was being built in 1896 to replace the covered bridge. During the brief period when the only transportation across the river was by ferry, a newspaper article noted that rum drinking and other vice had undergone a marked decline. In this view, the gatekeeper's cabin is clearly visible.



By the 1970s, through traffic hampered local traffic flow in downtown Gardiner, where Routes 9, 24, 126, and 201 intersected. A new steel and concrete, high-level fixed bridge was built in 1978, about ¼ mile to the north. The 1896 bridge was subsequently demolished.