



Female Academy

Norridgewock Historical Society Newsletter

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Bridges of Norridgewock

Historians remind us that Norridgewock and Skowhegan were part of the same town, known as Canaan. Naturally, people in our area were interested in getting across the Kennebec with their teams and livestock. For the inconvenience of many who had to go down the road a piece, Benjamin Moore, in 1789, had a ferry just above Skowhegan Falls.

At first, ferries boats and barges were used. And even when bridges were built, and were washed out, ferry service had to be resumed. The Norridgewock-Skowhegan area has had much in common with London Bridges falling down. Deacon Jn. Clark rigged up the first ferry in 1777. The first Norridgewock bridge, built in 1810, was 550 feet long, built on trusses or bands 100 feet apart, and was constructed wholly of wood. At a cost of \$3000. Part of it was carried away by ice in March, 1811 the following year. That summer it was repaired and remained 15 years. The tolls paid all of the original cost.

A new bridge near the old ferry was built on stone piers in 1827 at a cost of \$7000. March again took its toll, 4 years later on March 31, 1831. The third bridge, 1835 , had a new set of proprietors, obtained a charter and was built where the first one stood, with stringers resting on trusses and balance timbers. Supported by king posts with iron stirrups...carried away by a January freshet, yes, four years later. Costing \$5000 and rebuilt at \$4300, only to be carried off in 1846. Before we leave this bridge, turn with me to an excerpt from one of Sophie May's novels, "Quinnebasset Girls", page 323, a chapter entitled "On the River". Sophie's novel is a mixture of fact and fiction...with plenty of fact, according to old records for apparently she used some of the same source material that I found in Augusta among some old state legislature material in the archives. The chapter is prefaced with, "My will is a bondsman to the dark. I sit within a helm-less bark". Quoting from her Quinnebasset Girls ": "The Quinnebasset Bridge, the third one built in 10 years, had been destroyed by fire that fall, and a ferry boat was now used of which Mr. Whiting was in charge-that is when he chose to attend to his business. "When Charles (a youthful lover) walked back to the ferry (for he had a date with his girl, Emily, by name) it was past 10 PM. He blew the horn repeatedly, yet Mr.

Whiting did not appear. "No use ", thought Charles, you might as well try to wake a cave bear!". And, tired of wasting his breath, he concluded to take a canoe, which was moored to the bank, and paddle across. It was a foolhardy attempt, for the river was full of ice, and the canoe had only one oar. (Note: In Harmon's History of Norridgewock someone tried this and perished). But to get on with our story: "Charles managed very well, however, until he reached the middle of the river (stream), when a large drift of ice, coming with force, nearly upset the canoe, and the next moment, knocked the oar out of his hand. He tried to recover it, but it floated out of his reach. Here was a situation. The night was moonless and cloudy, and he found himself at the mercy of the current, drifting straight down to Poonoosac (Skowhegan) Falls. "Fortunately, he was within range of the ferry rope, and had the presence of mind to grasp it; but in doing so, his boat moved off from under his feet...and left him suspended by his arms. What would Emily think?".

But we must tear ourselves away from "Quinnebasset Girls".

Bridges 4 and 5 met the same fate as their predecessors. Number 5 had been "made of granite-one the ice would not affect ". It was ruined the day after completion.

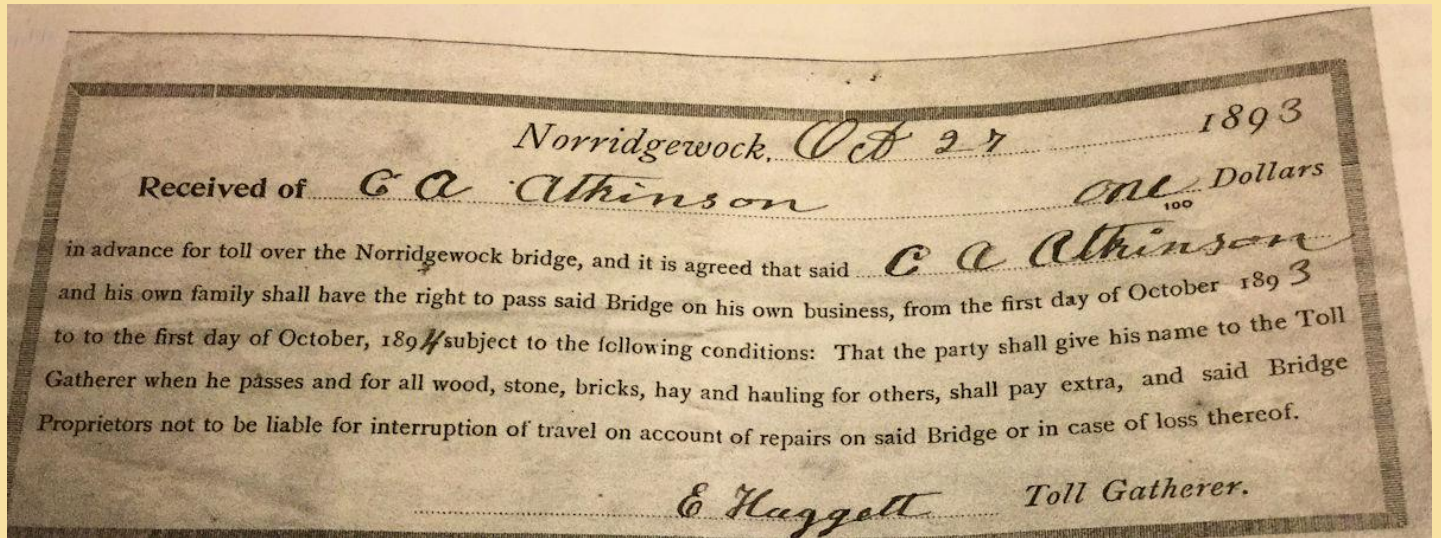
The sixth bridge lasted until the winter of 1869-1870. Ice broke up four times that year. Ice bergs thawed and froze again, melting and freezing, and heavy rains lasted for days. Water began to appear too close for comfort. Cattle were rescued from lowlands. People looked into each other's faces with fear. Just before midnight, the crash came , and almost the first warning was a loud Boo-OOOM, as the old bridge became a swirling mass, in its rush toward the sea.

We are reminded of Shakespeare's King Richard III, where in William wrote:"What dreadful noise of waters in mine ears! I passed me thought, the melancholy flood, with that grim ferryman which poets write of, unto the Kingdom of perpetual night".

In contrast, we finally come to bridge number seven, far superior to any of the others before or since. The old covered bridge built in 1870, and ironically torn down by a political generation not appreciative of its incalculable value as an example of 19th century skill as well as of priceless antique attraction. It need not have been destroyed, for it was "upstream of the "new" cement bridge of 1928, now used...by a number of feet or yards. Over the entrance to this bridge of 1870 were the words "NO DRIVING FASTER THAN A WALK \$5.00 FINE. This 1870 covered bridge was built by a cousin of Sophie May's, by the name of Pierce.

This bridge concerned the residents of Skowhegan as much as any. If in 1789, Moore's ferry inconvenienced Norridgewock people, so those of Skowhegan depended upon the

Norridgewock covered bridge, but in warm weather it served them well. In the winter, as it was many years before the Central Maine Power Company started to fool around with the dams, raising and lowering the water level it was generally safe to drive across the ice for several months, thereby reducing the bridge proprietors income from the bridge tolls.



Submitted by Rebecca Ketchum from her family archive. It is from a presentation Brad Ketchum made to Norridgewock Historical Society in 1981 concerning the bridges of our past.

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"In vain we mourn those transitory days  
Consumed in riot and licentious ways  
"'Tis temperance alone preserves our strength  
And mind and body to life's full strength."

Stitched by 14 year old Hadassah Thompson(1806-1832) in the school of Catherine Swain Lyman in Norridgewock, Maine.  
Although the temperance movement was gaining ground in 1820 it was unusual to stitch a verse like this on a sampler. Hadassah married James Wilder, a chair maker, and gave birth to Francis in 1831. She was twenty-six when she died in 1832.

**Submitted by Sallie Wilder**

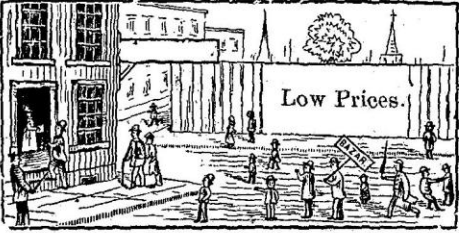


A Flyer from Norridgewock's "Boston Store", says it was in the "Post Office Block" which probably means Monument Square area. The flyer is about 4"x4", folded, so it has 4 faces, pictured below.

**January Clearance Sale.**  
**A Month for Bargain Seekers.**

**1897.**

Dollar Dress Goods marked down to 75 cts. 50 cent Dress Goods 32 cts. 25 cent Dress Goods 19 cts.




Come early and secure Bargains in Dress Goods. Such as Serges, Henrietas, Plaids, Flannels Cotton Goods

**Percales 5 and 6 cents. Other Goods way down prices.**

**Boston Store,**  
**Norridgewock, Me.**  
 Post Office Block.

Ladies Furnishings at **MARK DOWN PRICES.**



**Cambrics 5 cts. Silesias 13 cts. Best of silk 8 cts. Another lot for 5 cts.**

**Ribbons way down.**

**CORSETS.**

**Dollar brand for 87 cts. 50 ct. brand 42 cts**

**Machine Thread 4 cts. per spool**

All our Souv-  
enir Ware to be  
closed out at low  
prices.

Views of Main St.,  
High School Building  
Etc. Etc.

The handsomest ware ever seen in town.  
Will sell out the lot at the lowest prices  
to close the assortment.



**Big Mark Down in all kinds of  
crochery, Lamps, Tin and Glass-  
ware. Hand Thread 2 cts. 22 cts.  
per Doz. Johnson's Liniment at  
cost, 21 cts.**

## A big Snap for Men.

Dollar Underwear for 47 cts.  
Pants for Men \$1.50 for 79 cts.  
Best trade out for the capital in-  
vested.

One Hundred Vests and Pants  
for 19 cts. Worth 50 cts.

Bargains in Dress Shirts at 37,  
50 and 90 cts., all Laundered.  
50 ct. Gloves, 20 cts. per pair.


**BOSTON STORE.**

Norridgewock Historic Society  
Post Office Box 903  
Norridgewock, ME 04957

Thank you Town of Norridgewock for your support  
with your budget allocation for 2017.


\* Reminder: Annual dues of \$10 are payable every January.

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*Monthly Meetings resume April 26, 2017*