



## *Society for Industrial Archeology · New England Chapters*

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### **NNEC-SIA President's Report**

Hello; thank you for the opportunity to serve as your leader this year. I look forward to meeting many (most?) of you at our spring tour in Claremont, NH, on May 19th. This tour is packed with industrial archeology and it's all in one place except for the High Bridge which is only about two miles downriver. Bring someone along. We all must know at least one other person who would enjoy an SIA tour. Show him/her the flyer and invite them to ride with you. You'll have a good time talking about industrial history as you ride together, especially on the way back. You pay their \$5 donation but plan to stop for gas on the way and they will surely offer to kick in \$10.

We'd like you to be a part of our management team. Your input would be appreciated and respected as the second vice president. Sometimes people shun leadership positions until they get involved and then they're glad to be part of the inner circle. That's where you learn the most and learning about industrial history is fun. Please call me to discuss this at (603) 526-6939. Thanks.

Recommend a new tour. What site have we overlooked or what new type of site haven't we considered? Call me on that too or e-mail [dunmark@tds.net](mailto:dunmark@tds.net)

DIY industrial archeology. Enjoy researching something small in your own back yard. How often have you driven by an old dam, bridge, mill building, foundation and/or smoke stack and wondered what the story behind it was? It probably wouldn't warrant an SIA tour by itself but you could have the fun of researching it. Then take a picture and send a short write-up to David Starbuck, our editor. Start by asking at the town office for who would know the most about it and then call that person. While at the town office ask to see the town "tax maps;" they're open to the public (real estate people use them all the time). Find the site's lot # and you'll be able to read the ownership history of the lot. That will give you more detail for when you go to see someone. For instance, the owner in 1885 might have been NH Box Company. Go ahead, have fun and then send it in to David. Don't break a leg on someone else's property though; get permission first.

David Dunning  
NNEC President

# A Stone Arch Bridge in Connecticut's West Hills

## *The Skilton Road Bridge, Litchfield County*

### **Introduction**

The Skilton Road Bridge, designated as Bridge No. 4408 in the Connecticut Department of Transportation's State Highway Bridge log, is located along a small rural road in the northwestern portion of Watertown, crossing over the Nonewaug River. Skilton Road is generally less than 20 ft. in width and narrows to 14 ft. at the bridge. The bridge is located approximately 2,500 ft. west of Guernseytown Road. The Nonewaug River runs north to south through the project area with the western bank consisting of a vertical rock face. The eastern bank is steep but vegetated. The river's substrate under the bridge consists of cobbles, stones, and boulders. The original bridge appears to be founded on bedrock and crosses a naturally occurring constriction of the channel. A stone masonry dam located approximately 200 ft. upstream of the bridge may have been functional at one time, but the dam was partially breached during a storm in 2011. The impoundment is now completely filled with sediment and a common reed dominates the marsh.

### **Bridge Description**

The bridge is a single-span stone arch structure with a bridge span length of 20 ft. and an overall length of 35 ft., and a standing of approximately 30 ft. above water (Photograph 1).

Taking the overall form of a semi-elliptical arch, the bridge lies on a rock outcropping at its eastern end and rests atop a rubble wall on the west. Different cuts of stone are

used for the construction of the bridge; ashlars were used for the barrel of the bridge's arch (Photograph 2). The stone faces were cut to provide a smoother bearing surface. The wing walls of the arch barrel are made of smaller field stones that are roughly cut or uncut. The spandrels, which function to accommodate the outward push of fill, are made from uncut field stones of varying sizes locally quarried and show no signs of intentional shaping. The stonework is characteristic of rural dry-laid masonry techniques.

### **Historical Background**

The original request for purchase of land in the area dates to 1674 when 26 men from Farmington submitted a petition to the general court in Hartford for land to be used for a plantation near what is now known as the Naugatuck River. The land grant accorded by the Court included present-day Waterbury, Watertown, Plymouth, Thomaston and portions of Wolcott and Prospect. The Watertown area was settled in 1684 and officially became a town in 1780.

It included in the limits of the town was what was known as Guernseytown (Garnsey Town District), land found northwest of the town center and originally owned by Joseph Guernsey of Milford who had purchased it in 1730. Guernseytown Road crossed the center of the town from south to north while Skilton Road was the main artery running east to west, providing the primary travel route from Watertown to Bethlehem. However, the Nonewaug River



*Photograph 1*



*Photograph 2*

provided a serious impediment to travel as it flowed in a deep gorge that dissected the road from north to south. The bridge spans what has been referred to locally as "the Guernseytown section's Great Gulf. The gulf is a deep ravine that was carved out over the centuries by Great Swamp Brook, a tributary of the Nonewaog River" (Petersen 1987:A4).

A grist mill, known as Skilton Mill and dating probably to the beginning of the 19th century, was located just north of the bridge's eventual location on property owned by Mrs. Henry Skilton. A small shop that manufactured shingles, churns, cheese presses and boxes did business in conjunction with the mill's operation. The mill seat was eventually purchased by an M. Cleveland and became known as Cleveland's Grist Mill.

The ever-increasing need to provide an effective means of crossing the river at the mill's location eventually led the Watertown voters to authorize the selectmen in the fall of 1865 to proceed with the construction of an arched stone bridge across the Nonewaog River (Clouette and Roth 1991:8-1 from Watertown Town Meeting Records). The cost of building a stone arch bridge was usually twice the one of erecting a wooden structure. However, it would have been eventually more expensive to build a wooden bridge because of its location above the river's gorge. As well, there was a need for a bridge that could withstand the severe rainstorms that caused rivers to swell, particularly since there was a millpond located upstream, and mill dams usually were susceptible to failure during flooding events. The bridge was finally constructed during the following year and continued to be used for the next 100 years.

Locally available materials were used on the construction of these bridges: brownstone in the Connecticut River Valley, gray granite in eastern Connecticut, or gneiss in The Western Hills. As well, the towns themselves provided the skilled labor for their construction. It was common in the

19th century for a growing Connecticut town to have carpenters that could shape wooden forms upon which the stones were laid, and masons, who set the stones.

A number of stone arch bridges of similar construction were built in Connecticut, starting from the late 18th century through to the beginning of the 20th century for similar reasons. The need for a sturdy structure located on an important roadway that could withstand potential floods warranted the additional cost. Today, most of these bridges have long disappeared or have been drastically altered. There are twenty-one of these stone arch bridges extant in Connecticut and the Skilton Road Bridge is only one of three remaining examples in Litchfield County.

#### References

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Petersen, Daniel, 1987, "Bridge's construction spans the years," *Waterbury Republican*, June 13, 1987: A4.

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#### Southern New England Chapter (MA, RI, CT) Dues Schedule

Member Renewal	\$10.00
Students	\$8.00
New Member	\$8.00 First Year

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#### Northern New England Chapter (ME, NH, VT) Dues Schedule

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