Name, Location, Ownership
1. Historic name: Hooksett Village Bridge
2. District or Area: (Hooksett Village Historic District, eligible but not listed)
3. Street and number: Spans Merrimack River between Riverside St and Veterans Drive
4. City or town: Hooksett
5. County: Merrimack
6. Current owner: Town of Hooksett

Function or Use
7. Current use(s): Other-Abandoned, bypassed bridge
8. Historic use(s): Transportation-Bridge/road-related

Architectural Information
9. Style: Three-span Pratt truss
10. Architect/builder: Designer: John Williams
    Storrs, Storrs, Bridge
    Engineers; Builder: The United Construction Company
11. Source: Agreement, Contract
12. Construction date: 1909
13. Source: Contract, builder's plaque
14. Alterations, with dates: Southern span 1936;
    Gusset plates & new deck 1970
15. Moved? No ☐ yes ☐

Exterior Features
16. Foundation: N/A
17. Cladding: N/A
18. Roof material: N/A
19. Chimney material: N/A
20. Type of roof: N/A
21. Chimney location: N/A
22. Number of stories: N/A
23. Entry location: N/A
24. Windows: N/A
    Replacement? No ☐ yes ☐

Site Features
25. Setting: Village Center
26. Outbuildings: N/A

35. Photo #1
36. Date 10/26/07
37. Roll # 5 Frame # 5 Direction: N/NW
38. Negative Stored at: Hooksett Heritage Commission

32. Name: Kathleen Northrup, Chair
33. Organization: Hooksett Heritage Commission
34. Date of survey: January 11, 2008
39. Location Map

[Map Image]

Hooksett Village Bridge, 300 Epping Rd Bridge

Google Map

© 2007 Tel Atlas
40. Property Map

OWNED BY TOWN OF HOOKSETT

X X OWNED BY STATE OF NH
41. Historical Background and Role in the Town or City's Development:

Key Dates

February 20, 1909  Town Warrant, Article 9. To see what action the town will take with reference to repairing, replacing, or rebuilding the bridge over the Merrimack river, what amount of money shall be raised therefor, the method of raising the same and to pass any votes relating thereto.

March 9, 1909  Town meeting authorized funding for construction of a new steel highway bridge at a cost not to exceed $26,000

March 16, 1909  Agreement for engineering services signed by Hooksett Selectmen and John W. Storrs

April 17, 1909  Memorandum of Agreement/Contract signed by Hooksett Selectmen and The United Construction Company

November 1909  Bridge opened

March 1936  Southern span washed away in flood

December 1969  Weight limit reduced to 6 tons

1976  Closed (new Hooksett Memorial Bridge dedicated August 7, 1976)


November 16, 2000  Designated as an Official Project of Save America's Treasures

State Coordinate # 083/150

Prior to 1805 travelers and residents used a ferry to cross the Merrimack River in the Hooksett village area. The Londonderry Turnpike, which ran from Concord, New Hampshire, to the Massachusetts state line, brought travelers and large quantities of goods through the village. The turnpike was privately funded by the Londonderry Turnpike Corporation which was incorporated in 1804. The corporation charged tolls along the turnpike's route. From the north, the four-rod turnpike entered the village along NH 3A, before turning to the southeast along Main Street. In 1805 an act of the legislature was secured allowing the erection of a toll bridge at "Islehookset Falls" where the turnpike crossed the Merrimack River. The corporation erected the first bridge, a wooden, three-span, covered structure, over the Merrimack in Hooksett in 1805 to ensure uninterrupted passage along the road; it immediately put the ferry out of business.

While the turnpike was designated a free way in 1836, the corporation continued to collect a toll at the bridge. The repair and upkeep of the bridge seemed to have been a constant problem for the corporation so it sold the bridge in 1853 to the Town of Hooksett (incorporated in 1822) for $1,640, and toll charges were removed thereafter.
On September 20, 1857, the old turnpike bridge burned, along with the adjacent Concord Railroad bridge and a store at the site of what is now Robie’s Country Store. Each was rebuilt, though the highway bridge was destroyed again in a freshet two years later. The third highway bridge on the site was a three-span, wood, Towne lattice truss bridge completed in 1859. It stood until replaced by the present steel bridge.

In 1908 town fathers began to question the safety of the 1859 wooden covered bridge. They secured the services of John Williams Storrs, a bridge designer/engineer, to prepare a condition assessment. In July of 1908 Storrs wrote to the Board of Selectmen and reported: “The bridge has been over strained and computations show it to be structurally weak. I would advise immediately that you limit the loads to the lightest possible. Have automobiles go slow, and horses walk.”

The Selectmen presented an article in the February 20, 1909, Town Warrant. Article 9 read: “To see what action the town will take with reference to repairing, replacing, or rebuilding the bridge over the Merrimack river, what amount of money shall be raised therefor, the method of raising the same and to pass any votes relating thereto.” At the town meeting on March 9, 1909, the voters authorized funding for construction of a new steel highw ay bridge at a cost not to exceed $26,000.

On March 16, 1909, the Selectmen executed an agreement for engineering services with Storrs; he was to be paid 5% of the total contract price for his services.

On April 17, 1909, the town hired The United Construction Company of Albany, New York, as contractors. On the builder’s plaque (now on the lawn on the Arsh W. Prescott Historical Library for safekeeping), the American Bridge Company of New York is listed as the builder.

The bridge opened for traffic in early November 1909. A newspaper article of November 27, 1909, when the bridge was accepted by the Board of Selectmen, reported that the “citizens of Hooksett are to be congratulated upon having one of the best and most thoroughly constructed up-to-date bridges in this part of the country.”

Not everyone was so enamored with the modern bridge. Another newspaper writer on November 9, 1909, notes that:

... the new bridge has settled into the every-day life of the village, as if it were always a part of the established order of things, and had not crowded out the picturesque old structure, whose long, dimly lighted tunnel always affected the imagination so strongly, and among whose timbers the river voices echoed mysteriously. ... There isn’t a suggestion of a sentimental idea in the whole 516 feet of the length of this decidedly modern product of the mines and the mills. The river’s ripple or roar is not echoed by its steel. It calls up no memories of the stage coach days and Giles’ Tavern. The whole can be expressed in terms of length, breadth, weight and cost. It is a right business-like, adequate, progressive looking fabric. ... It has been three months in building, and is a first rate bridge.

The new structure replaces a wooden one that stood for fifty years, and was the successor of similar ones that were swept away by flood or fire. The old one was the typical wooden-covered bridge, which is gradually disappearing. While, of course, everyone welcomes the new one, there was something about the veteran with its half century of traditions and its suggestions of by-gone days that made it attractive. The plunge from light into its shadows, the swaggy motion, the unearthly music of its timbers when the river was high, the staid, old-fashioned air of it all and the memories it called up were things which the new
generation will not know. But the new bridge provides a good road across the river, and that is what Hooksett has been wanting for a long time."

In March of 1936 the flood Governor H. Styles Bridges called "the worst disaster ever to befall the State of New Hampshire" caused devastating damage in many cities and towns; Hooksett Village was no exception. Upstream of the 1909 traffic bridge, a three-span wooden railroad bridge, built in 1868 by the Concord Railroad, had been scheduled to be dismantled by the Boston & Maine Railroad, but the flood intervened. In half hour intervals, each of the spans was swept downstream. One went under the car and railroad bridges and broke up with pieces ending up at the Amoskeag Bridge in Manchester. One hit the rear of the buildings along Common Ave (now Veterans' Drive), hung up for a while, then dislodged, causing the buildings to collapse. And one knocked out the southern span of the steel bridge. Remnants of the steel span lodged in the river downstream. When the river is low, one can still see those remnants today.

For about a month Hooksett residents could not cross the Merrimack without traveling to Concord or Manchester. By April the State Highway Department had constructed a footbridge along the Boston & Maine Railroad trestle for use by pedestrians. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) played a major role in reconstructing New Hampshire roads and bridges. The southern span of the bridge in Hooksett was rebuilt by WPA workers by September 15, 1936, and the bridge opened once again to traffic. Life gradually returned to normal in the village.

The State took over maintenance of the bridge in the mid 1950s although it remained town owned.

The bridge served Hooksett well until the late 1960s when safety concerns began to surface. In 1968 George Steers, a member of the School Board, called for an assessment by a private engineering firm. He was concerned about the safety of school children. He reported that four school buses went over the bridge eight times a day. There were also several accidents a year. The bridge was only 18 1/2' wide; bridges designed in 1968 were 24' wide. The weight limit was 12 1/2 tons. The NH Department of Public Works and Highways, however, considered the bridge "safe" as long as the weight of vehicles was kept below 12 1/2 tons. A spokesman for the Department said the State had "recently put in $22,000 worth of repairs which made the condition of the bridge good."

In December of 1969 the weight limit was reduced from 12 1/2 tons to 6 tons because of a weakness found when the bridge was being repaired. In December of that year concerns over safety led to unusual measures. In order to meet the new weight limit, school children, traveling from the west side of the river to attend classes on the east side, were driven to the bridge where they got out and walked across while the bus waited. Once all the children had crossed, the empty bus would drive to the other side, pick the children up and travel on to school. This continued until the bridge was closed.

In 1970 the town began to explore the possibility of a replacement bridge, but it was not until the 1972 town meeting on March 7, 1972, that funds for the town's share of a new bridge were requested. The warrant article passed 315 to 46.

The new Memorial Bridge opened on July 27, 1976, when local dignitaries led the first town vehicle and school bus across the bridge. The steel bridge ended its first phase of service to the town. During its use, it was the only Merrimack River crossing between Manchester and Concord.
On March 30, 1988, a Thematic Review was conducted by a committee comprised of members from various agencies. Members included Daniel Geiger and John Moore of DOT, R. Stuart Wallace, Linda Wilson, and Gary Hume of SHPO; and Harry Kinter from FHWA. The bridge was deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places with a total of 25 points on the review scale.

In 1994 the town began to think about the future of the bypassed steel bridge. Barricaded and closed to all vehicular and foot traffic since 1976, the talk turned to demolition or preservation. At the town meeting on May 13, 1994, an article was presented to the voters to establish a trust fund in the amount of $10,000, for the purpose of “dismantling the old Merrimack River Bridge.” Although an amendment to change the use of the fund to “conducting an engineering study” failed, the original article was soundly voted down by a vote of 27 Yes, 154 No.

With the proposal to dismantle it defeated, attempts were made to rehabilitate the bridge, to preserve it for its historic and aesthetic value. The president of the Historical Society, with the support of the Town Council and the Sewer Commission led the effort. Their plans were to make the bridge a pedestrian walkway to link both sides of the river. They hoped it would be the Merrimack River crossing of the 230-mile Heritage Trail, a proposed foot and bike trail from the Massachusetts line to the Canadian border. The bridge was to be a centerpiece of the community, a place where people could meet and enjoy the river, go to an art show or concert, or participate in other civic events.

An application for a matching grant under the Transportation Enhancement Program of the NH Department of Transportation was filed in October 1995. It was granted in June 1996; the project was to be included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program for Fiscal Year 2000. Unfortunately, during that period requirements were amended and costs escalated. A supplemental grant request in 1999-2000 was denied. Without the necessary funds, the project was abandoned.

Since 1969 the bridge has been critical to a part of Hooksett’s infrastructure. It carries the operational sewer line across the river on the outboard of the bottom chord along the east side of the bridge. The jacketed sewer line is supported by channel brackets bolted to wide flange sections that extend below and are bolted to the bottom flanges of the outside two stringers. Support locations are adjacent to truss panel points.

The Town Council renamed it The Lilac Bridge1 in 1997 at the suggestion of Grace Pomeroy, then president of the Historical Society. It was designated an Official Project of Save America’s Treasures in 2000.

There is hope that the bridge may again play an important role in Hooksett’s community life. It is located in the recently approved Tax Incremental Finance (TIF) District. If funding becomes available, the intent is to preserve the bridge and revive the plans from the 1990s to provide a pedestrian walkway, a place for community events, and a spot from which to enjoy the view and access the river and nearby parks and businesses. The bridge project would supplement other economic revitalization plans for the village.

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1The name acknowledges the NH State flower, the purple lilac. Original Historical Society plans included planting many different varieties of lilacs at each approach.
42. Applicable NHDHR Historic Contexts:

82. Pre-automobile land travel, 1630-1920
88. Automobile highways and culture, 1900-present

43. Architectural Description and Comparative Evaluation:

Renamed The Lilac Bridge in 1997, the former Hooksett Village Bridge, connected the east and west sides of the community and was an important linkage both physically and visually. It is located in the village section of Hooksett, at the approximate middle of a reverse curve in the river 0.28 miles southeast from NH Route 3A. It spans the Merrimack River connecting Riverside Street on the north and Veterans’ Drive at the south end. It is a “sole survivor,” the only remaining three-span Pratt truss bridge in NH. It was bypassed and barricaded in 1976, when the Hooksett Memorial Bridge was built just downstream.

The village area surrounding the bridge is the cultural and historic heart of Hooksett. Nearby are the Congregational Church of Hooksett (1846), Town Hall (1828), Arah W. Prescott Historical Library (1909, eligible for State and National Registers), Robie’s Country Store (present building 1907, on the National and State Registers), Prescott Tavern (1794), first Village fire station, Holy Rosary Church (1889), site of the railroad station, mill housing, and the largest concentration of homes of architectural interest.

The Hooksett Village Historic District was recommended eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The bridge was identified as a contributing element to this potential district (Hengen 2005).

The bridge was designed by John Williams Storrs, who holds an important place in New Hampshire history and was considered the pre-eminent bridge designer of his time. Storrs was born in Montpelier, Vermont, on November 24, 1858, but his family moved in the early 1870s to Concord, New Hampshire. He later learned practical civil engineering under the instruction of Charles C. Lund, a well known civil engineer of Concord. Storrs started his long career in structural engineering in 1890 when he entered the employ of the Concord & Montreal as an assistant civil engineer and continued with its successor the Boston & Maine until 1911. He also served as the first state highway engineer for NH for two years starting in 1903 when he was appointed to the position by Governor Batchelder.

In 1906 Storrs established his own engineering firm in Concord, soon taking his son Edward as his partner. Storrs focused on providing towns with bridges that met certain loads in order to meet new state legislation of the period. Storrs bridges were designed with a capacity for carrying twelve-ton trucks. The steel bridge in Hooksett is featured in a 1918 booklet (Storrs: A Handbook for the Use of Those Interested in the Construction of Short Span Bridges) written by the Storrs & Storrs firm.

Storrs was appointed as chief engineer for the Public Service Commission in 1911 when it was created as a regulating body for railroads and public utilities; he later became a member of the board and served as Chairman until 1931. At the time of his retirement from private engineering practice in 1933 he had been responsible for the construction of more New Hampshire bridges than anyone else. He designed hundreds of bridges across New England, first for rail and then for highway, including more than 40 metal truss bridges for car and truck traffic in New Hampshire. He went on to serve as Mayor of Concord from 1934 to 1942. He passed away in office on September 19, 1942.
Description.

This riveted three-span bridge is an example of a multi-span High Pratt truss constructed during the first decade of the twentieth century (1909). The bridge sits on stone abutments and two stone piers. The structure length is 490’ consisting of three spans measuring 166'-6", 166'-6" and 148’. The bridge has an out-to-out width of 19'4" and a curb-to-curb width of 18'6". A cantilevered sidewalk along the west side of the bridge measures 4’10” wide. The bridge has a 15’5” vertical clearance.

The bridge is comprised of three trusses. Two of the trusses are original, constructed in 1909. The southern truss was replaced in 1936 when the original was destroyed by the 1936 floods. This truss resembles the two original trusses. The northern truss is made up of eight panels each measuring 18’6”. The middle and southern trusses each comprise 9 panels each measuring 18’6”. There is a 3’ break between each truss at the piers.

The three trusses are similar in appearance. The top chords and inclined end posts are built-up riveted box sections consisting of two channels joined back-to-back with continuous top plates and bottom lacing bars. Bottom chords are built-up members consisting of channels joined back-to-back with top and bottom tie plates. Some vertical and diagonal members have intermittent plates. Portal bracing consists of a lattice truss strut with T-section flanges and arched bracing. Sway frame struts and bracing are all constructed with angles.

The flooring system consists of floor beams carrying eight lines of beam stringers spaced approximately 2’5” on center. The timber deck is in poor condition and has a heavily cracked and deteriorated bituminous overlay.

A historic metal railing is located on the outside of the cantilevered sidewalk on the west side of the bridge. (See Photo 4.) At the northern approach, the sidewalk and railing extend beyond the last span for several feet. There are then three lengths (approximately 10’9” each) of metal post railing with a decorative metal end post. On the east side, a similar metal post railing along the interior of the bridge also extends beyond the last span. It, too, has a decorative metal end post.

A sewer pipe is attached to the upstream side of the bridge.

A 1999 inspection report notes that the overall condition of the bridge is fair to poor with significant deterioration in the decking. The trusses have little to no paint protection and have developed a fairly uniform layer of surface rust. No significant section loss of top chord, diagonal, or vertical members was found at that time, although some broken lacing bars were noted. The condition of the superstructure in 1999 was also noted as fair to poor. Section loss to angle sections and tie plates was noted at vertical and diagonal truss member locations just below the level of the roadway. Floorbeam/truss connections exhibited moderate to major corrosion, some section loss and plate distortion as well. Critical floorbeam web ends exhibited fair corrosion at the truss connections. At several floorbeam end connections to the trusses, top flanges exhibited severe corrosion and section loss. Adjacent to the floorbeam/truss location, some bottom chords exhibited section loss.

The existing timber deck is in poor condition. The timbers are generally soft and spongy with the roadway surface fraying at many locations. The decking is loose and separated at some locations. A 2006 field view

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indicates that the bridge continues to remain in fair-to-poor condition but has been relatively unaltered. Despite the poor condition of the structure, the bridge retains integrity due to the minimal alterations it has sustained through time.

Alterations:

In 1936, the southern span (Span 1) of the original bridge was impacted by a wooden truss bridge washed downstream during a flood. The steel superstructure collapsed into the river and was destroyed. This truss was rebuilt by the State in conjunction with the WPA shortly thereafter. The 1936 reconstruction utilized flood emergency funds to facilitate this reconstruction and the repair was completed, in part, with WPA work forces by September 15, 1936. Fabrication and erection of the rebuilt span were done by The American Bridge Company. Plans on file with the Department of Transportation indicate that the design for the replacement span closely follows the original. The reconstructed southern truss is an integral component to the bridge and was designed to fit in with the remaining two trusses that were not damaged by the flood. Contract plans dated 1936 indicate that the original sidewalk railing was also replaced at that time.

In 1970, gusset plates were repaired on Span 3, and a new laminated wood roadway deck was installed over the entire length of the bridge. The laminated deck differs from the original.

44. National or State Register Criteria Statement of Significance:

In 1988 representatives of the Federal Highway Administration, the NH Department of Transportation, and the State Historic Preservation Office concluded that the bridge was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Lilac Bridge is the only three-span High Pratt truss in New Hampshire and is therefore considered an extremely rare resource. Because it is the only example in New Hampshire, it is considered to have statewide significance.

The bridge is eligible under the first State Register criterion for its association with WPA funding during reconstruction activities after the 1936 flood.

There are no known significant individuals (other than John W. Storrs identified under the third criterion below) that would merit listing under the second criterion.

It is also eligible for listing under the third State Register criterion for its engineering significance. Despite its fair-to-poor condition, the Lilac Bridge is an intact example of an early twentieth-century multi-span riveted truss highway bridge, built to maintain a safe load for the use of automobiles and trucks. It is a rare surviving example of a three-span High Pratt truss bridge. Further, the bridge was designed by John W. Storrs, a partner in Storrs & Storrs, an important New Hampshire bridge building firm during the early twentieth century. The bridge’s association with John W. Storrs qualifies it under the third criterion as an example of work by an important engineer(s).

The Lilac Bridge also contributes to the Hooksett Village Historic District (Hengen 2005).
45. Period of Significance:

1909 construction
1936 replacement of southern span

46. Statement of Integrity:

The Hooksett bridge conveys its significance through its physical appearance. It meets the requirements for the seven categories of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

47. Boundary Discussion:

The historic boundary would include the footprint of the bridge and both the north and south approaches. Parcels adjacent to the approaches on both ends are property of the town.

48. Bibliography and/or References:

Anonymous, Raging Rivers and the WPA, New Hampshire, October 1936. 1936, Works Progress Administration pamphlet. NH Department of Transportation, Concord, NH.

Chase, Benjamin, History of Old Chester from 1719 to 1869. 1869, published by author, Auburn, NH. Hooksett Public Library.


Hegen, Elizabeth Durfee, “Hooksett Village Historic District Area Form,” prepared for the NH Department of Transportation. 2005. Division of Historical Resources, Concord, NH.


Agreement, Storrs and Town of Hooksett, Engineering Services, 3/16/1909. Town Clerk’s Office.

Letter, Greer (NH DOT) to Hooksett Historical Society, 6/6/1996.

Letter, Save America’s Treasures to Hooksett Town Administrator, 11/16/2000. Administrator’s Office.

Letter, Storrs to Hooksett Board of Selectmen, 7/14/1908. NH Department of Transportation files.

Meeting Record, Town Meeting 3/9/1909. Town Clerk’s Office.
48. Bibliography and/or References: (continued)

Memorandum of Agreement, United Construction Company and Town of Hooksett, 4/17/1909. Town Clerk’s Office.
NH Department of Transportation Enhancement Program Application, 1995. Administrator’s Office.
NH State Highway Bridge Inspection Report, undated (post 1970). NH Department of Transportation files.

“A bridge to his, and city’s, past,” 11/19/2004, Concord Monitor
“Doubt Safety of Hooksett Bridge,” 12/26/1968, Manchester Union Leader
“Foot Bridge for Hooksett Residents,” April 1936, newspaper unknown

“Hooksett Bridge Posted,” 12/31/1969, Goffstown News
“Hooksett Seeks New Bridge,” 12/5/1971, Union Leader
“Picturesque Bridge and Its Entrance Removed,” 11/9/1909, newspaper unknown. Hooksett Word and Picture Stories (Scrapbooks), Hooksett Public Library
“School Board discusses Bridge Problem,” 11/19/1970, Goffstown News
“Tripping Merrily toward Hooksett’s infamous town bridge,” 9/11/1972, Union Leader

Surveyor's Evaluation:

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Photo #2  Description: East elevation, jacketed sewer line
Roll #: 5  Frame #11  Direction: N/NW

Photo #3  Description: West elevation, sidewalk
Roll #: 5  Frame #15  Direction: N/NE
Address: Hooksett Village Bridge  
Date taken: 10/26/07  
Negative stored at: Hooksett Heritage Commission

**Photo #5**  
Description: West elevation interior, sidewalk, timber deck  
Roll #: 5  Frame # 10  Direction: NW
Address: Hooksett Village Bridge  
Date taken:  
Negative stored at: digital copy, Hooksett Heritage Commission

Photo #6 description: Historic photo, during construction in 1909
Roll #:  
Frame #  
Direction: NE

Photo #7 description: historic photo, during construction, 1909
Roll #:  
Frame #  
Direction: N/NW
Address: Hooksett Village Bridge
Date taken: Negative stored at: digital copy, Hooksett Heritage Commission

Photo #8 Description: Historic photo, Postcard of "new bridge"
Roll #:  Frame #:  Direction: N/NW

Photo #9 Description: Historic photo, south end of bridge, Main Street/Common Ave, trolley line, prior to 1933
Roll #:  Frame #:  Direction: NE
Address: Hooksett Village Bridge  Date taken: Negative stored at: digital copy, Hooksett Heritage Commission

Photo #10  Description: Historic photo, March/April 1936, after flood, missing southern span, catwalk built for pedestrians
Roll #: - Frame #: - Direction: N

Photo #11  Description: Historic photo, Southern and middle span, 1974/1975
Roll #: - Frame #: - Direction: NE