


Toll Sign (*circa* 1800)

From the Cornish-Windsor Toll Bridge

(On Display at the New Hampshire Historical Society Museum)



RATE OF TOLL.

	Cts
Each foot passenger	3
Horse rider	8
Two wheeled Pleasure carriage	20
Four wheeled do do do	50
Cow	30
Cart or waggon by one beast	10
Drawn by two beasts	15
Loaded do do	25
By three do empty	20
Loaded do do	30
By four do empty	25
Loaded do do	37½
Each additional beast	5
Sleigh drawn by one beast	20
By two do do	15
Sled by one do do	6½
By two do do	12½
By four do do	25
Each additional beast	6
Horse jack or mule	4
Neat cattle	3
Sheep & swine each	1

Transcription of the Toll Sign and Notes

Rate of Toll.

	cts
Each foot passenger.....	3
Horse and rider.....	8
Two-wheeled Pleasure carriage.....	20
Four-wheeled... d[itt]o... d[itt]o.....	30
Curricl.....	30
Cart or wagon by one beast.....	10
Drawn by two beasts.....	15
Loaded... d[itt]o.....	25
By three... d[itt]o... empty.....	20
Loaded... d[itt]o.....	30
By four... d[itt]o... empty.....	25
Loaded... d[itt]o.....	37-1/2
Each additional beast.....	3
Sleigh drawn by one beast.....	10
By two... d[itt]o.....	13
Sled by one... d[itt]o.....	6-1/4
By two... d[itt]o.....	12-1/2
By four... d[itt]o.....	25
Each additional beast.....	5
Horse jack or mule.....	4
Neat cattle.....	3
Sheep & swine each.....	1

Notes:

- The word *ditto* may be unfamiliar to students. In this context, it means “same as above.”
- A curricl was a light two-wheeled vehicle drawn by two horses. Students might be curious about other vehicles listed on some toll signs: chairs, chaises, surreys, and phaetons.
- Neat cattle are bovine: i.e., cows and oxen. A jack is a donkey, or jackass. Swine are pigs.
Information about relative values of money is available on a Web site sponsored by Economic History Services: [How Much Is That Worth Today?](#)

Background

In the late 1700s and well into the 1800s, overland travel in New Hampshire was not easy; the roads were few, and they were difficult to travel. The number of streams and rivers in water-rich New Hampshire presented other problems: there were virtually no bridges. New Hampshire historian Jeremy Belknap noted that for small stream crossings, early road builders would sometimes choose a beaver dam because it is “three or four feet wide at the top, which is level with the water above, and is always firm and solid.”

A wide river like the Connecticut, however, would present a serious obstacle to a traveler. Private companies took it upon themselves to construct major roads and bridges to meet the needs of a developing state—and to make a profit. The companies charged tolls to offset their construction and maintenance costs. Into the mid 1800s tolls were collected on the eighty-two turnpikes in New Hampshire.

The bridge over the Connecticut River between Cornish, New Hampshire, and Windsor, Vermont, for which this toll sign was made, opened October 18, 1796. Jonathan Chase, who had previously provided a ferry service over the river, was authorized to collect tolls to defray his costs in building and maintaining the bridge.

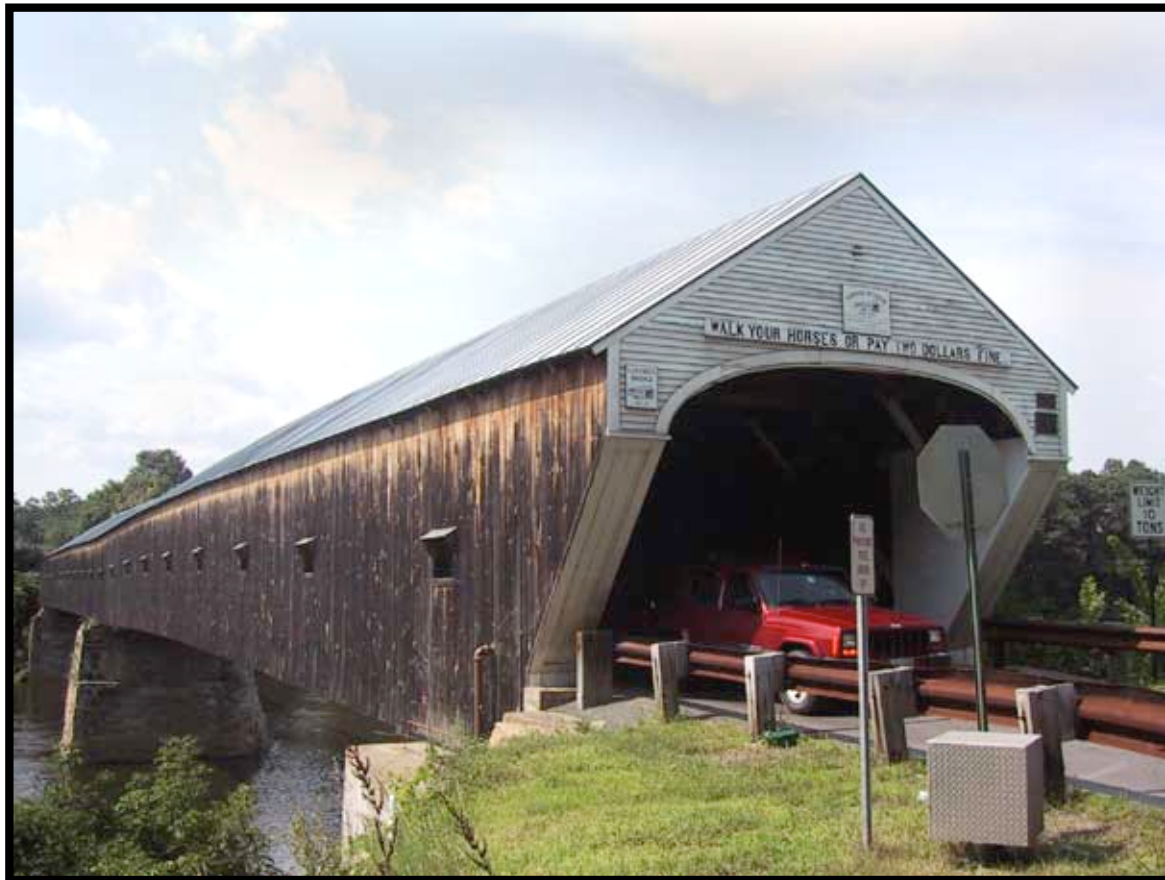
Even though tolls had established rates, special arrangements were sometimes allowed. In 1813, for example, one young Vermonter was allowed

to pass the Bridge one year for \$3, pleasure passing only and to have a lady with him if he pleases.

Another such agreement, in 1811, had a few more stipulations. For \$3.00, Mr. Samuel Huggins was permitted passage for a year for

himself, wife and a boy; afoot, horseback, or in pleasure carriages—and may fetch over with his team such as a side of Beef or have a doz [sic] Bushels of grain or if he wanted to fetch a barrel or 2 of Cider—of his own raising...

The bridge was especially important to Vermont farmers, who were separated by the river from the Boston market. Toll records for 1837 indicate the passage of 13,233 sheep and 2,420 head of cattle, all headed to Boston. Beef from the cattle would be shipped, fresh, to Nova Scotia and, salted, to the West and East Indies.



The covered bridge that currently crosses the Connecticut between Windsor and Cornish is no longer a toll bridge. The state of New Hampshire, the current owner, stopped collecting tolls in 1943. It is also important to know that this is not the original bridge built by Jonathan Chase—which was not covered.

In 1824, Jonathan Chase's bridge was destroyed by flood. Four years later, the bridge built in its place was also destroyed by flood. This third bridge suffered the same fate in 1866. It was replaced by the covered bridge, which in reconstructed form, stands today. The bridge is the longest wooden covered bridge in the country and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Questions and Suggestions for Study

Toll Sign and Transcription Questions

1. What observations can you make about spelling in 1796? About money?
2. What do you think the abbreviation “do.” stands for?
3. Can you figure whether such tolls would be considered inexpensive or expensive by modern standards? (How much are tolls today?)
4. Where are tolls paid today in New Hampshire?
5. What do the words “curricle,” “jack,” “neat,” and “swine” mean? What observations can you make about the type of traffic that would cross the bridge?

Sources of Information

Garvin, Donna-Belle and James. *On the Road North of Boston*. Concord, NH: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1988.

N.H. Department of Public Works and Highways. *A History of the Proprietors of Cornish Bridge and the Cornish, N.H – Windsor, Vt. Covered Toll Bridge (1796–1943)*. Concord, NH, 1983.

Wikoff, Jerold. “New Hampshire’s Early Roads,” *Valley News*, in *Mountains, Mills and Malls*. Volume contains no editorial or publication data. *Ca.* 1986.

Possible Topics for Study

The history of New Hampshire is in many ways the history of changes in transportation. While the topics suggested here all pertain to road travel, equally rewarding study could be made of the importance of rivers and canals and of the railroads and air travel.

Locating turnpikes, the early private roads, in New Hampshire provides information about what towns were commercially important at the time—are they still?—as well as suggesting the tendencies of commerce toward Boston (rather than toward our own once-thriving commercial center, Portsmouth). The state’s covered bridges are well documented, too. Also of interest would be the locations of taverns and inns, important coach stops as well as centers of town activity. Many still stand in small towns throughout the state, but even local residents may be unaware of their significance.