A Brief History of Montgomery's Covered Bridges

Montgomery Historical Society
Pratt Hall 1835

When it comes to covered bridges Montgomery enjoys an abundance of riches. Why were they built? Why were there so many? Who designed and built them? How did they get their names?

N.W. Clapp in Abby Hemenway's 1871 History of Franklin County….

"Montgomery is … surrounded by mountains and hills on all sides, except the NW corner which affords passage by the Trout River, forming in the aggregate a not very bad facsimile of **a tray with one end broken out.**"

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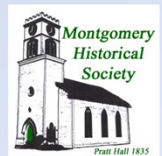
A key to understanding our covered bridge story is Montgomery's topography which was noted early on.   An early essay by N.W. Clapp described Montgomery as a tray with one end broken out. Water collected on the tray and exited the broken lip of the tray.
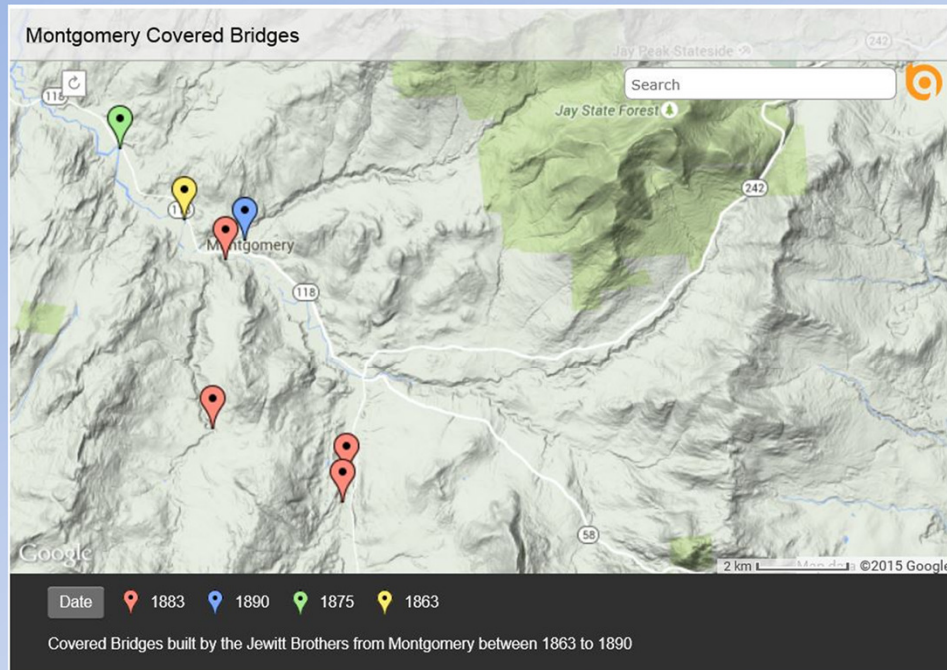
Montgomery Tray (aka Watershed)
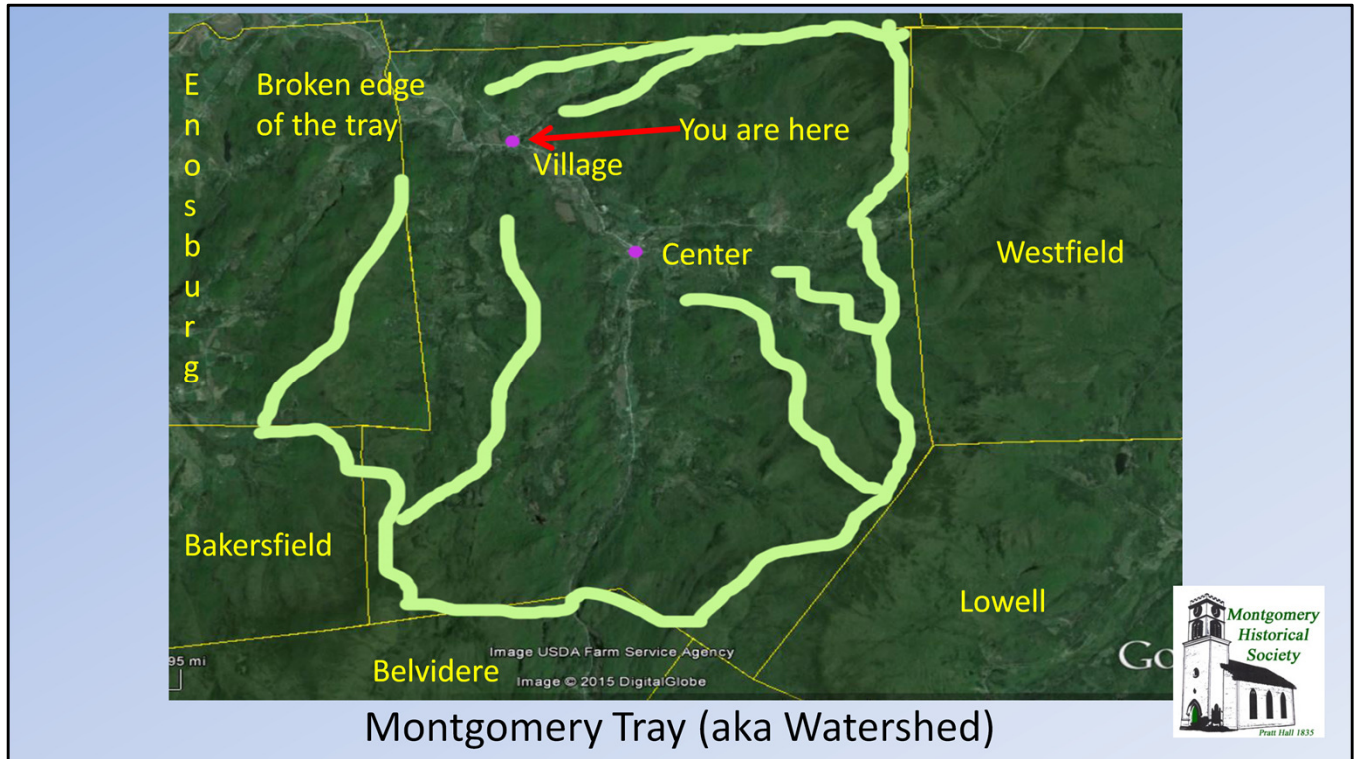
It's a bumpy tray though.

This is imagery of Montgomery with the ridges highlighted.

Brooks and streams' mini watersheds form in between each pair of lines and ultimately form the Trout River which flows out of the northwest corner towards the Missisquoi.

Many bridges were needed.

Montgomery Tray (aka Watershed)

 This is essentially the same view with the locations of the current covered bridge locations plotted.

 3 bridges span the Trout River (at least 6 used to)

 3 are over feeder streams (South Branch, Black Falls and West Hill brooks)

 Hectorville is no longer there but is a pretty spot to visit.

## N.W. Clapp in Abby Hemenway's 1871 History of Franklin County….

"**Jay mountain**, on the east, is by far the most lofty of the range-- the Peak ranging next to Camel's Hump in the State, in altitude. It is sometimes **resorted to by pleasure-seekers**, but the distance is found to be too far from civilization and carriage roads to have the pleasure amount to much".

As an aside Mr. Clapp went on to describe Montgomery's Jay Peak area as an area "sometimes resorted to by pleasure seekers"…

N.W. Clapp in Abby Hemenway's 1871 History of Franklin County….

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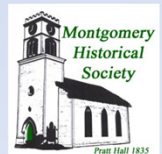
Although the pleasure didn't amount to much because it was too far from civilization.

Early Montgomery History

1780 – Granted & 1789 - Charter Approved
1793 - First Settlers (Clapps)
1802 - First Town Government
Antebellum - Hill Farms, Sheep and Fledgling Dairy and
        Timber Industry
Civil War – 103 Montgomery men served in the Civil War.
        -- Estimated 37% of 18-45 year old males
        -- 20% died
1870 – 1920 - The "Golden Years"

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This timeline shows the milestones in the early history of Montgomery.

Montgomery experienced steady growth until the Civil War, with a mix of farming, sheep, and logging.

But after the Civil War things really took off and this was the period when most of the bridges were built.

The local economy became largely timber related in the so called "Golden years".

Montgomery's population reached it's apex in 1900 with 1,876 people, making it the 6th largest town of 15 in Franklin County.

And even though it lost population over the next 20 years, other county towns lost more and Montgomery was actually the 5th largest town by population in 1920.

By 1990 we were the smallest of the 15 towns, again.

Post Civil War
Episcopal Church Renovations

During this period there were many outward signs of prosperity.

For example, the Episcopal Union Church was closed for 2 ½ years for an expansion.

Gothic features, a bell and clock were added. As were stained glass windows and furnishings.

1873 Montgomery Businesses Included:

4 tub factories
2 grocery stores
3 general assortment stores
2 taverns
6 churches
1 grist mill
1 hardware store
1 furniture shop
1 tannery
1 sash, door, and blind factory
Spruce gum, wooden trays, and
                    shingles

1 molding, finishing &
                    church furnishing shop
5 blacksmith shops
11 saw mills
2 millinery shops
2 doctors / 1 doctress
1 undertaker
2 sextons
6 carriage makers
1 machinist

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8 years after the end of the Civil War business was booming, again mostly related to the timber industry and supporting services.

This a just partial listing.

1883 Montgomery Businesses Included:

4 tub factories 7
2 grocery stores
3 general assortment stores
2 taverns
6 churches 8
1 grist mill 2
1 hardware store
1 furniture shop
1 sash, door, and blind factory
23 Carpenters/builders
 7 Shoe / boot makers
 5 Coopers

1 molding, finishing &
          church furnishing shop
5 blacksmith shops 8
11 saw mills 10
2 millinery shops
2 doctors / 1 doctress
1 undertaker
2 sextons 4
6 carriage makers
1 machinist
Spruce gum, wooden trays, and
          shingles

10 years later even more. (shown in red)

This reflects an abundance of raw materials, water power, and a rail transshipment point nearby in E. Berkshire for easy shipment of finished goods.

" twenty men and teams were constantly required just to haul the products of the various mills to the railroad in East Berkshire"

Source: "History of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties" 1891, cited in "Montgomery VT: The History of a Town" by Sara Taylor and W.R. Branthoover

8 years later still booming…

And in order to access the raw materials and ship out the finished products they needed many bridges

This shows the area in Montgomery Center at the intersection of Route 118 and 58, looking north towards the Baptist Church and Sylvester's Market.

The yellow arrow indicates the Highway Bridge.

June 1897 - Total yearly butter tub production in Montgomery was estimated at over 1.5 million tubs per year. The highest of any town in the U.S.   Source: St. Albans Daily Messenger

Six years later…

Butter tub production was peaking, most produced at the Hutchins mill south of the Center and the Nelson and Hall Mill just up the Hazen's Notch Rd.

The Nelson and Hall tub mill on Route 58 burned and was rebuilt in the early 1900s. The new mill had electricity, and according to the St Albans Messenger, 65 men could make 600,000 tubs/yr.

By comparison the Hutchins mill, shown above, had 150 men making 800,000/yr. The Hutchins mill burned in 1914. The yellow arrow indicates the Hutchins Bridge.

11 Bridge Locations circa 1945

You are here

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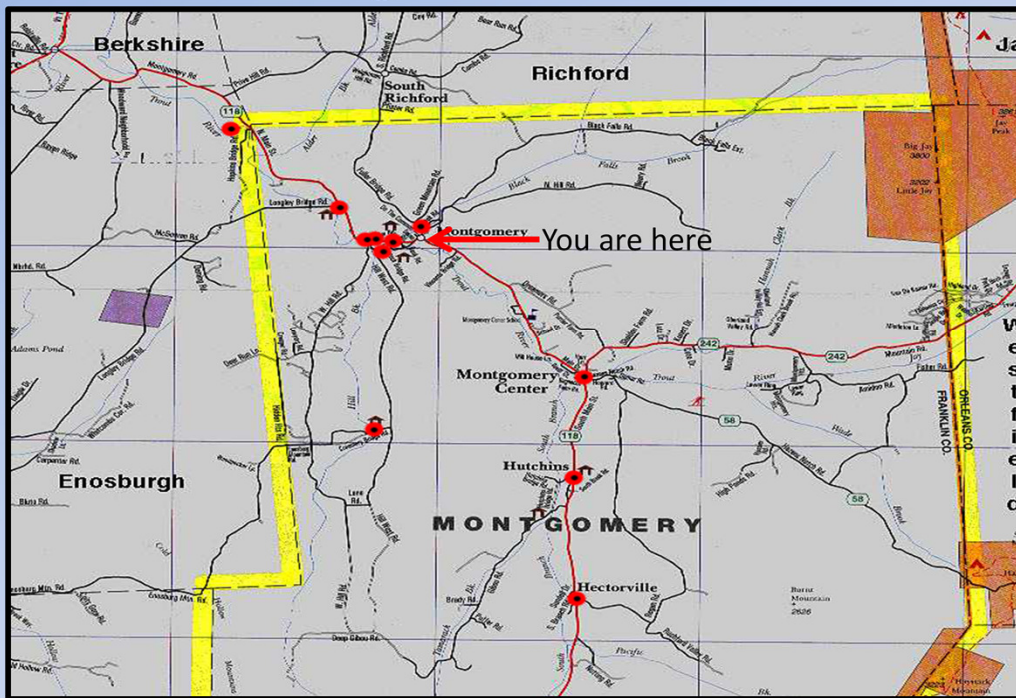
Depending who you talk to there were between 11-13 covered bridges at one point in time.

This map shows the location of 11 circa 1945. Any place the road crossed a brook was a potential site though.

The next series of pictures are of these 11 sites.
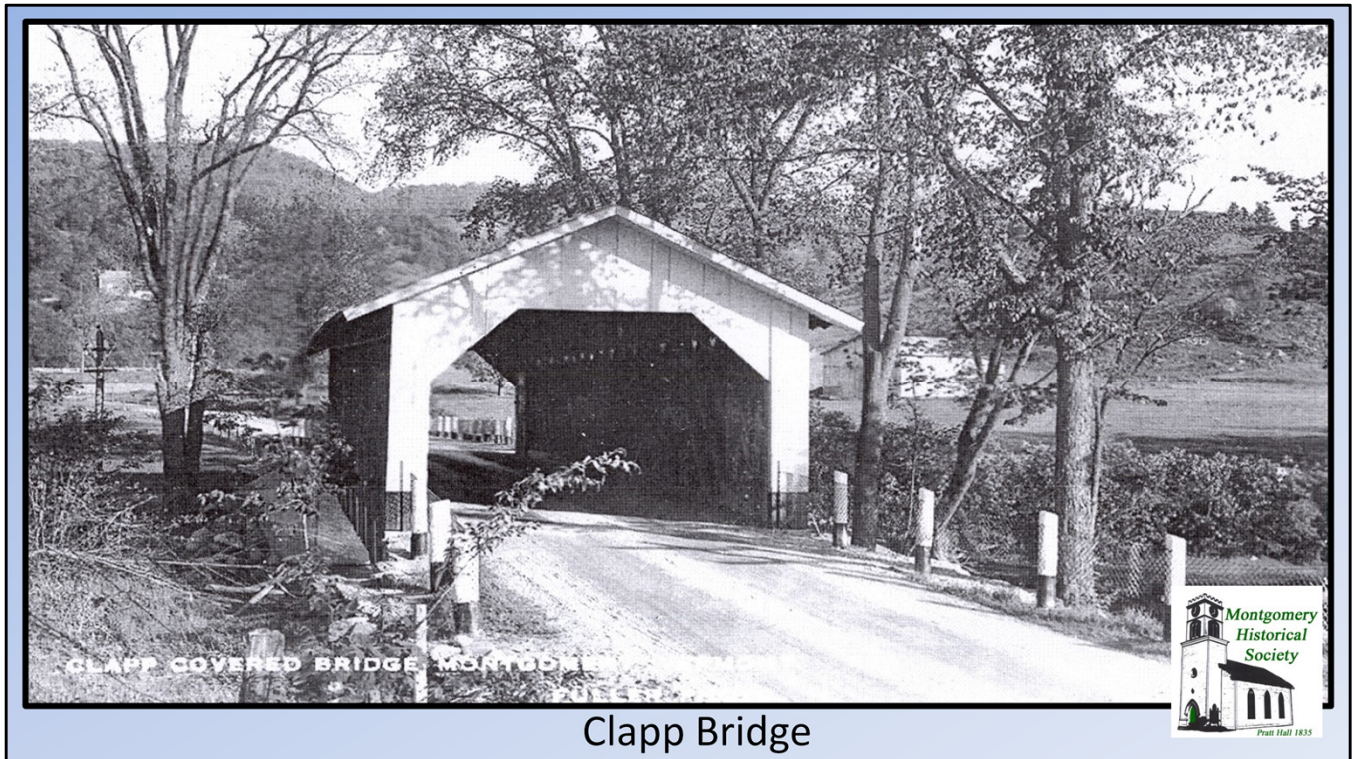
Clapp Bridge

This and most of the other historical bridge pictures in this presentation were Real Photo Post Cards taken by Clayton Fuller who lived in Montgomery near the Fuller Bridge.

The Clapp Bridge crossed the Trout River but it is no longer there.

Crossed the Trout River

Comstock Bridge

A VERMONT COVERED BRIDGE
MONTGOMERY VT. FULLER P...

Still There

Spans the Trout River

Creamery Bridge

Still there

Spans the West Hill Brook

Close to Jewett Bros. mill / farms

Fuller Bridge

Still there

Spans the Black Falls brook (formerly called the Mill Brook)

Highway Bridge

No Longer there.

Spanned the Trout River

Notice the advertising and the electrical street lamp over the entrance.
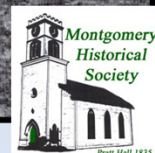
Hutchins Bridge

Still there

Spans the South Branch brook

Levi's Bridge

No longer there

Spanned the West Hill Brook.

A VERMONT COVERED BRIDGE
MONTGOMERY VT.
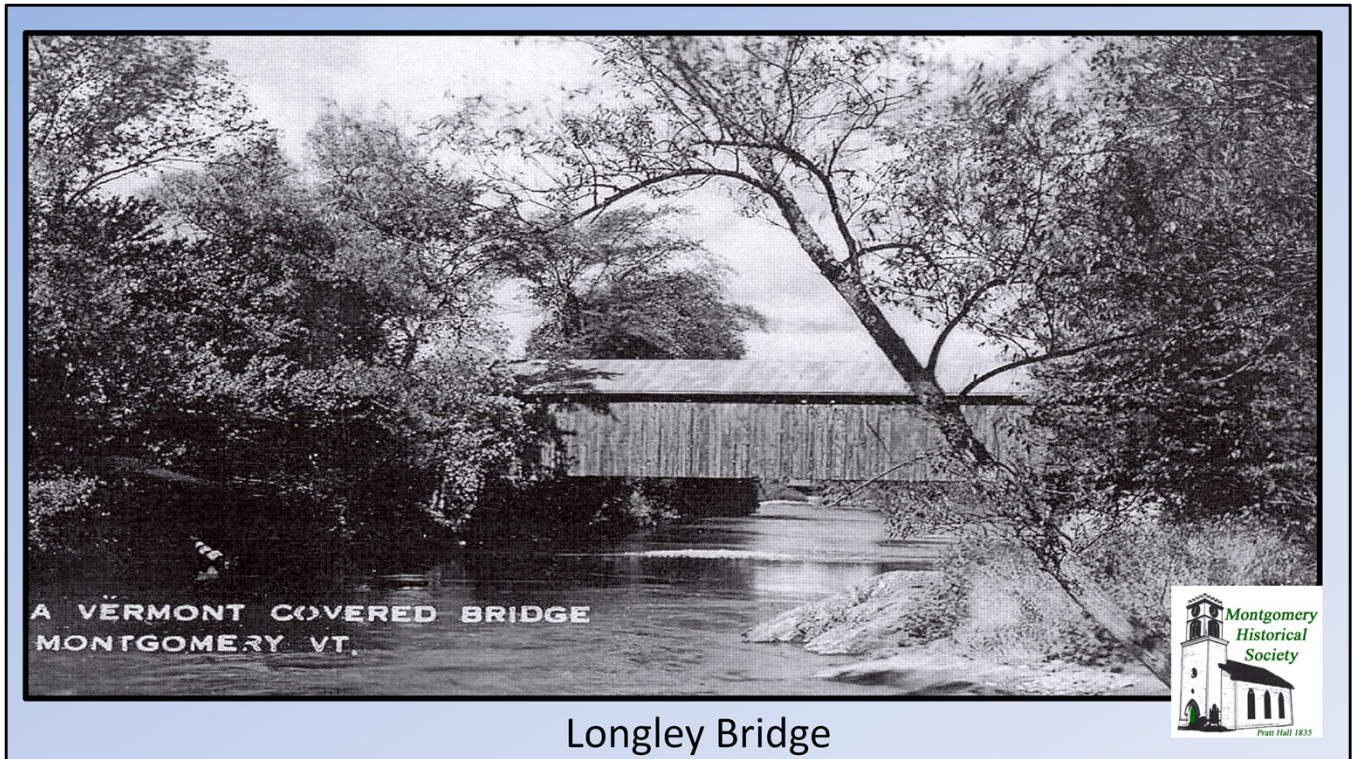
Longley Bridge

Still there

Spans the Trout River

It had a major renovation in the 2016-2017 timeframe.
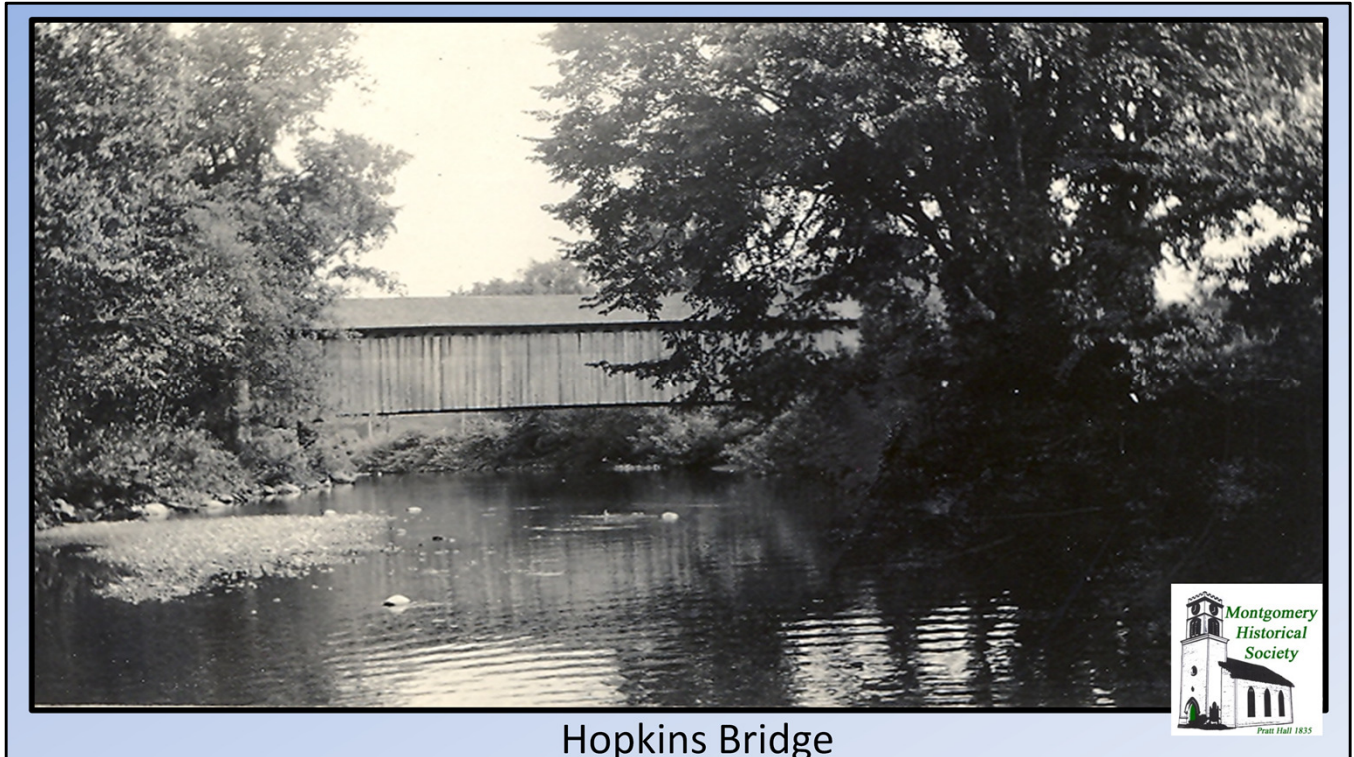
Hopkins Bridge

Still there

Spans the Trout River

Just in Enosburg, built by the Jewett Bros.
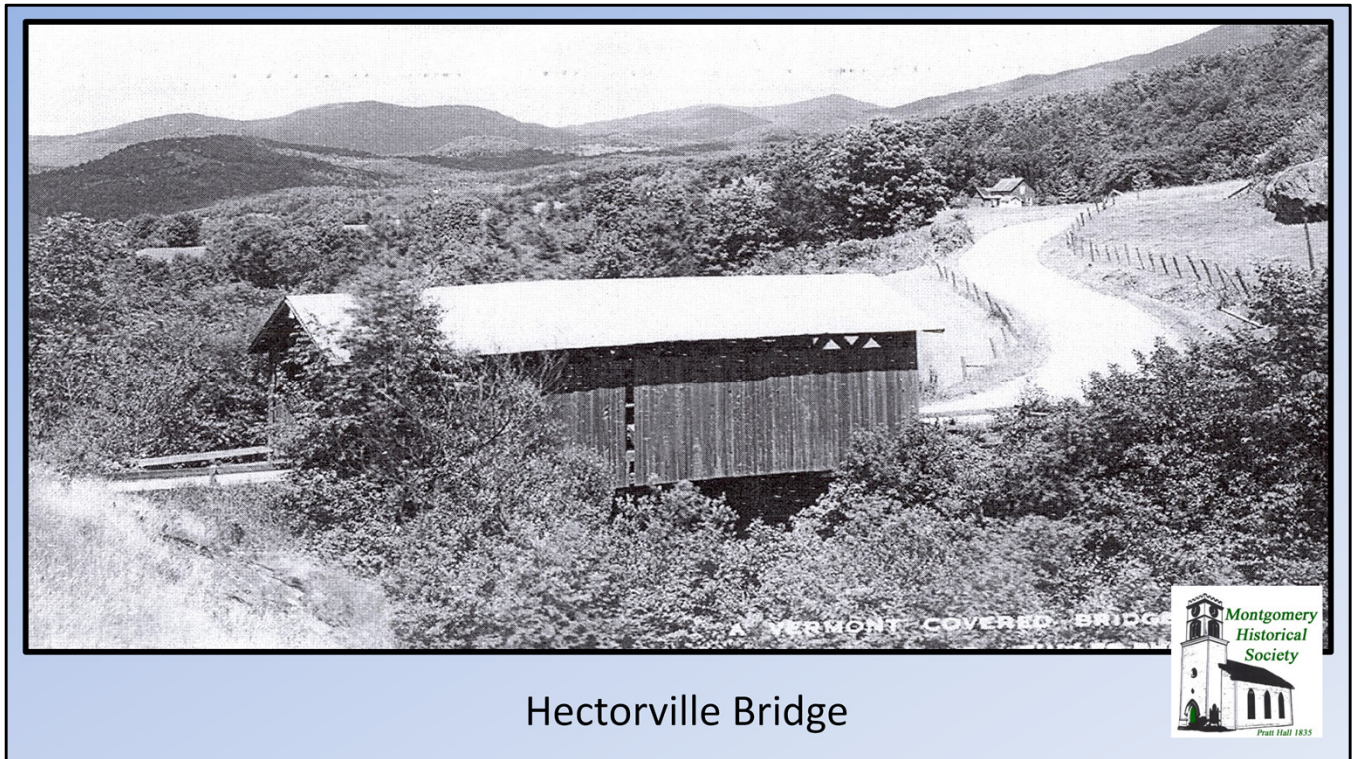
Hectorville Bridge

No longer there

Spanned the South Branch brook

May have been relocated from the Village "gutter".

Bypassed with a concrete bridge in part to allow more modern and heavy logging vehicles access to the Gibou area of Montgomery.

Several attempts to resurrect it have failed.
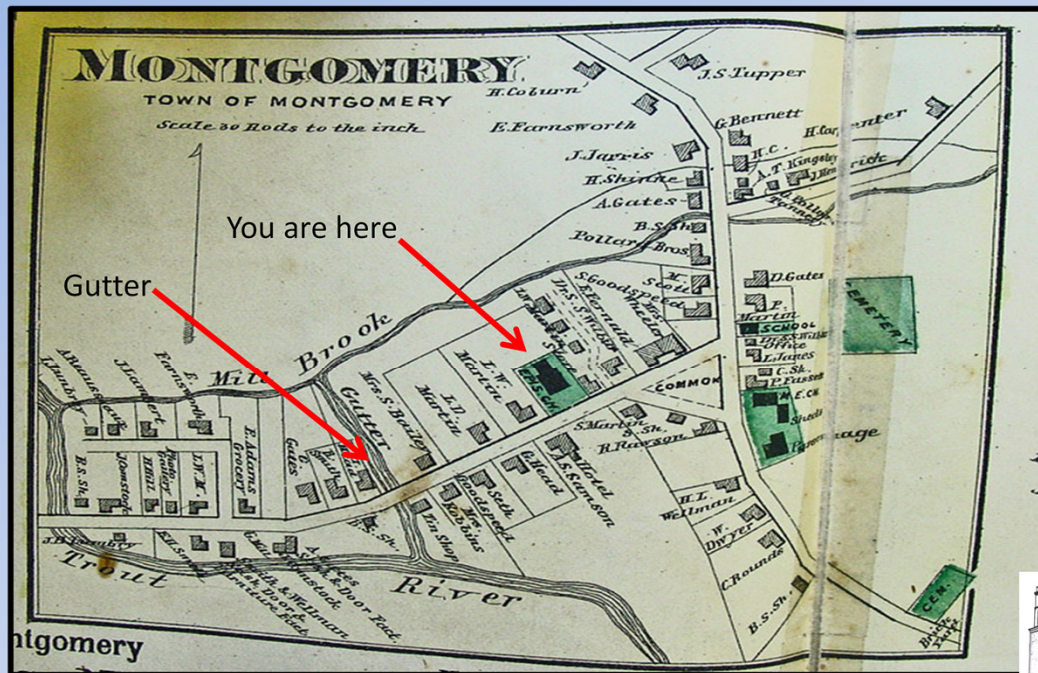
1871 Beers Map of Montgomery Village
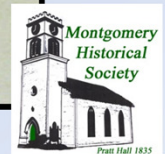
This is a map of the Village area circa 1871.

A man made/enhanced gutter, large ditch or canal, used to connect the Black Falls (Mill) brook and the Trout River and was probably used to move logs to the mill on the Trout River. A covered bridge spanned the gutter.

We believe this bridge was moved to the South Branch brook and became the Hectorville bridge.
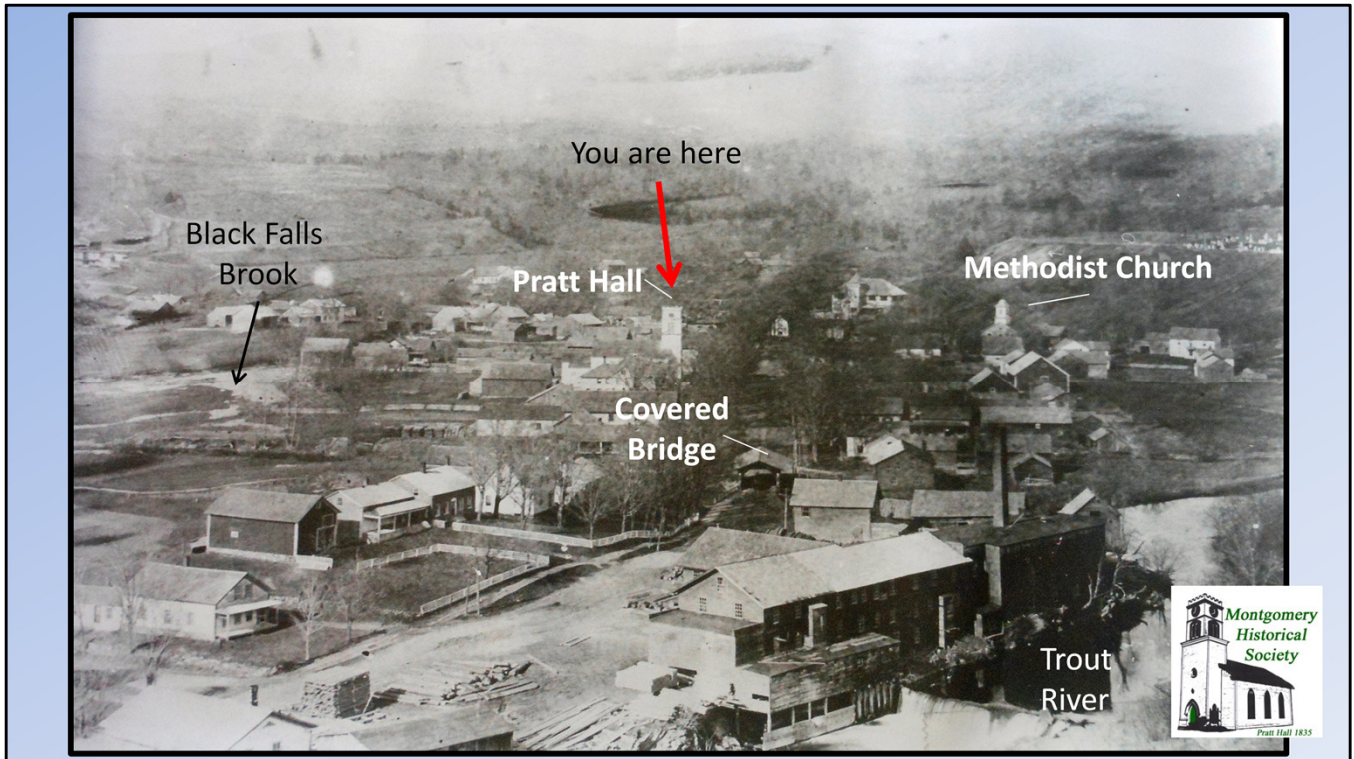
Here is a picture of the area shown on the previous map. The gutter ran from the Black Falls Brook on the left to the Trout River on the right just upstream from the dam.

The area behind the dammed up Trout River was euphemistically referred to a "Lake Goodspeed".

The bridges were moved and re-used. They normally were named by the family, area, structure or geographic feature nearby. Over time abridge could have two or three names.

All our bridges use the Town lattice design
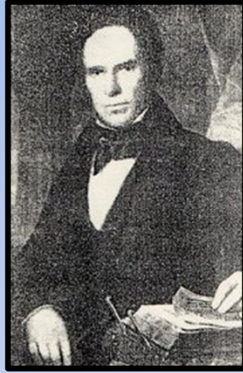
- Ithiel Town patented the design in 1820
- Charged $2.00/foot royalty fee
- Relatively cheap & easy to construct
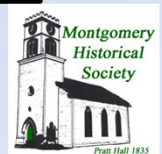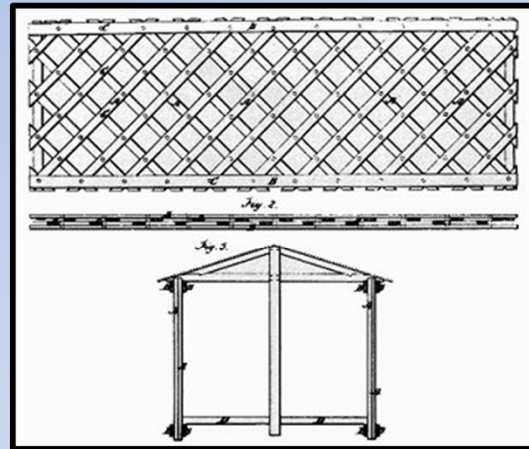
All the bridges use the same design, Ithiel Town's lattice truss.

Ithiel Town also designed and built other buildings including the state capitals in CT, SC, and IN.

Most people feel the bridges were covered to protect the expensive timbers used to construct the trusses, floor and roof regardless of design.

Montgomery Covered Bridges' Jewett Brothers...

- Family of 13 kids, 10 boys (Mother born in Ireland Margret O'Connell, Father Samuel)

- Lived in and around Montgomery. Clustered in the Hill West / West Hill area

- All listed as Farmers/Farm laborers in the various censuses
  Savanard listed as a "lumber manufacturer" in 1900.
  Savanard bachelor until he was 53, married his 60 year old
    cousin in 1904. Widowed 2 years later.

- Built buildings (1889), Loggers, Mill Operators, and Real Estate

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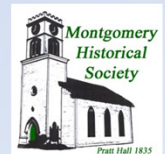
All the bridges were built by the Jewett brothers, principally Sheldon and Savanard.

Not a lot is known about them. They came from a large family and lived mostly in the Hill West / West Hill area.

 In most of the census they identified themselves as farmers.

 Savanard actually moved to NH at one point and worked in a shoe factory according to census records.

The Jewett Brothers and Sisters

Name	Birth-Death	Age at Death
John	1840-1864	24
Sheldon	1842-1889	47
William	1846-1916	70
Savanard	1848-1925	77
Bramon	1850-1911	61
Giles	1852-1929	77
Samuel	1854-1925	71
Alfred	1856-1882	26
Oscar	1857-1880	23
Eldora	1858-1882	24
Andrew	1860-1930	70
Orlinda	1862-1930	68
Mary Jane	1867-1940	73
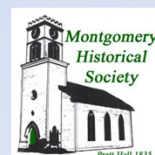
This is a list in birth order of the 13 Jewett kids.

Margret had 9 sons in a row!

Four children died in their 20s.
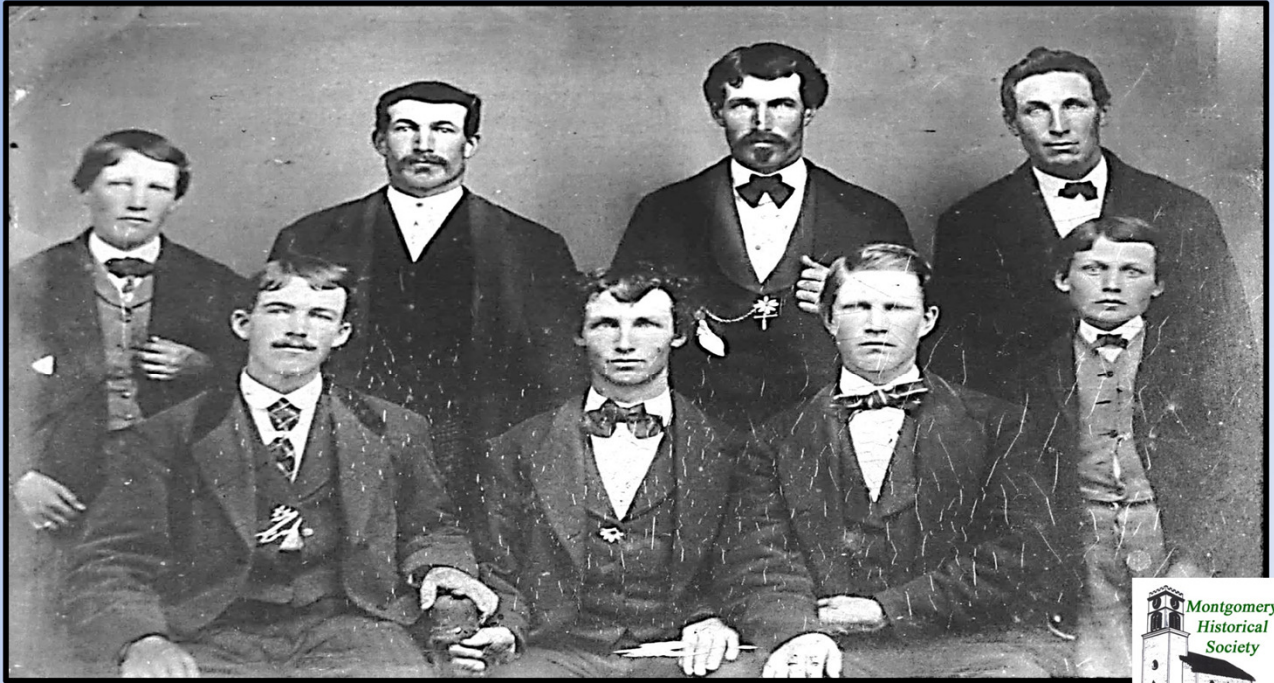
Back Row L to R: Samuel, William, Savanard, Sheldon
Front Row L to R: Bramon, Giles, Alfred, Oscar circa 1870

This photo shows 8 of the 10 boys.

Savanard and Sheldon are back row, right.

This photo was likely after the Civil War and before 1889.

They certainly look prosperous, don't they.

Savanard Jewett's farm on West Hill
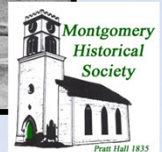
These next few slides are Jewett family photos.

This is Savanard at his farm on West Hill not too far from their lumber mill.

Savanard Jewett's farm on West Hill

Zooming in shows Savanard with his horse.

Savanard Jewett Near West Hill Mill
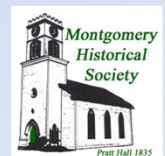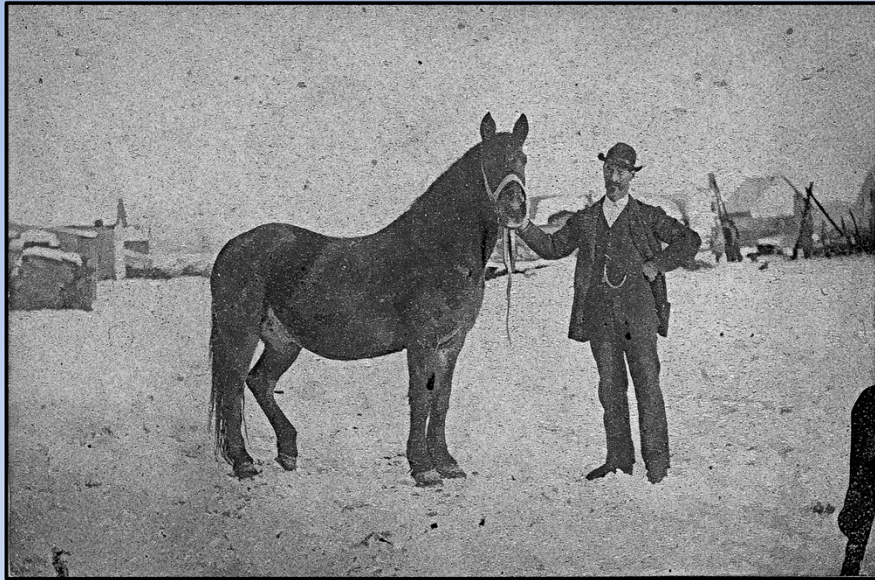
Savanard with horse near what we think is the Jewett's mill site near the Creamery Bridge between West Hill and Hill West

Bridge Under Construction
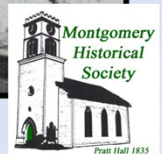
This photo shows Savanard and William on what we believe is the Comstock Bridge under construction.

Jewett Family circa 1899

William is standing, far right with the rifle.

Bridge Under Construction

We believe this is their crew working on the Comstock Bridge.

Several workers have trunnels (from "tree nails") square headed wooden pegs used to connect the timbers into a truss.

Bridge Under Construction
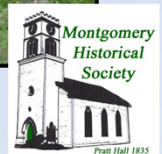
This picture was taken in 2005 during a periodic restoration and repair of the same bridge.

Sheldon & Savanard are Buried Next to Each Other In Montgomery Village Cemetery

Photos by Barb Destromp, www.findagrave.com
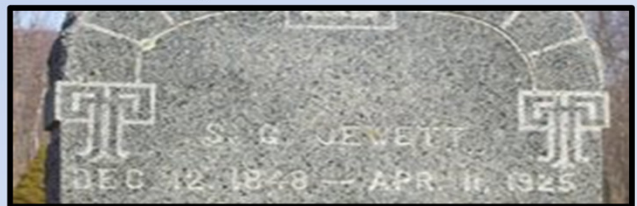
Sheldon and Savanard are buried next to each other in the Montgomery Village cemetery.

Table Made by Savanard Jewett

Reverse Painted &
Gold Leaf Glass Top
w/ Fish and Water Motif
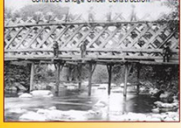
This is a game table made by Savanard for his nephew, Gordon. It passed to Duane and Parma Jewett who still live next to the Comstock Bridge. It is reverse glass painted with a water and fish motif.

A Covered Bridge pamphlet & map can be printed from our web site.

This MHS pamphlet on the bridges can be downloaded from our web site. It includes a map.   Several bridges also now have State of Vermont Historic Site markers.

This is the MHS Home Page. This presentation, pamphlet with map, and GPS coordinates are available at the Covered Bridges Link.

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