

Historic Significance

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Images by Michael Weitzner



Update On the Follett Arch Bridge Restoration

After forty-five years, the Follett stone arch bridges preservation project continues to unfold in Townshend, Vermont. The story begins in the 1970s, when people in Townshend succeeded in placing bridges designed and built by local farmer, untrained mason, and Civil War veteran James Otis Follett on the National Register of Historic Places. Since then, maintenance of six of his stone arches has become an evolving collaboration of municipal and volunteer efforts. The Townshend Historical Society has led efforts to preserve the Follett bridges, acquiring funding from public and private sources to pay for an assessment of conditions to inform a plan for restoration.

Stone Trust founder Michael Weitzner provides walling expertise and does the restoration work. In 2018, he produced a report for the historical society that provides the basis for planning. Since then, he has executed an emergency repair on a collapsing spandrel wall on the West Townshend Bridge and completed repairs on the Negro Brook Bridge (perhaps soon to be renamed; the Rename Negro Brook Alliance and the Townshend Historical Society are considering renaming the bridge for Susan Toby, a black

woman who lived in Townshend in the eighteenth century.) The following page includes before and after images of the restoration.

Michael writes:

The bridge is one of the six surviving stone arches built by James Otis Follett around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The arch itself is in excellent condition and requires no attention. Parts of the spandrel/wing walls were in poor condition and are being rebuilt as needed. Since this is a historic preservation project, the approach taken is to leave intact what is still sufficiently sound and replace the collapsed or unstable portions using a minimally intrusive approach that reflects the style of the existing stonework, which is quite rough in character.

Townshend Historical Society continues fundraising efforts to further restoration of the West Townshend Bridge. Work on the three other Follett stone arch bridges has not been scheduled. For more information about the Follett stone arch bridge restoration, please visit our blog. □



Top, Left: Arch bridge before restoration; All other images, this page: Arch bridge after restoration