

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Atherton Bridge

AND/OR COMMON

Atherton Bridge

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Bolton Road

CITY, TOWN

Lancaster

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2nd

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

025

COUNTY

Worcester

CODE

027

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☒ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☐ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☒ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Town of Lancaster

STREET & NUMBER

Town Hall

CITY, TOWN

Lancaster

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Worcester County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

2 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Worcester

STATE

Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of Historic Assets of the Commonwealth

DATE

1977

☐ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Massachusetts Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

294 Washington St., Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT

☐ DETERIORATED

☒ GOOD

☐ RUINS

☐ FAIR

☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED

☐ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE

☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Atherton Bridge is a single span pony truss constructed in 1870. Located on Bolton Road, in a rural area surrounded by flat, open flood plain, the bridge spans the Nashua River approximately 3/4 miles east of South Lancaster.

The eight truss paneled structure has a span of 72' and width of 18½' and rests on large granite block abutments. Although the bridge is not a patented version of the Post truss like the nearby Ponakin Bridge (NR-eligible) it employs many Post truss features such as diagonal compression members that incline toward the center of the bridge and riveted dual tension rods that incline outward, the outermost of which extend two panels and the others across one panel. Compression members are Phoenix Columns (patented by the Phoenix Iron Co. of Phoenixville, Pennsylvania). The end posts are vertical dual tension rods. Top chords are riveted compound beams. Floor construction consists of a cross planked deck supported by longitudinal planking on riveted transverse "I" beams that rests directly on the bottom chords, an older type of bridge technology. Wood transverse beams notched to fit over the bottom chords are spaced between each "I" beam.

Because several compression members are loose from their fittings, the bridge has been closed to traffic for several years.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES 1870

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Atherton Bridge possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship and is associated with major transportation and the development of routes in Lancaster. In addition, it is one of two remaining examples known to the Historic American Engineering Record of an important nineteenth century bridge truss type.

When erected, the Atherton Bridge was Lancaster's first iron bridge. Built on one of the main roads into Lancaster, the bridge is the most recent in a succession of earlier bridges. As was common practice, the structure was named for a nearby family, the Athertons, descendants of James Atherton, one of the signers of the petition for incorporation of Lancaster in 1653.

The bridge, which was built by the town for the sum of \$4,000 in 1870, incorporates many design features of the Post truss, patented by Simeon S. Post c. 1866. S.S. Post was a well known New Hampshire born civil engineer "whose work in addition to bridge design and building included surveys and construction of railroads, particularly the New York and Erie. He was the originator of the system of railroad baggage checking universally adopted and drew the first design for making railroad time tables. He was also a founding member of the original (1852) American Society of Civil Engineers."¹

The Post truss is distinguished by compression members that incline toward the center of the bridge. It was a major bridge form in the second half of the nineteenth century and was the most frequently used bridge form for the trans-continental railroad. Other important Post truss bridges include the Union Pacific Railroad's crossing of the Missouri River at Omaha. Two and one-half miles in length, this bridge was the largest on the line. The Missouri River crossing of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad was also a Post patented bridge with a span of 256'. Despite the truss' popularity, the Atherton and the nearby Ponakin Bridges (NR-eligible) are the only known surviving examples. Taken together, the bridges comprise a unique pair of structures representing an important era in American engineering.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Allen, Richard S., Iron Bridges on S.S. Post's Patent
Condit, Carl, American Building Art, 19th C., vol I, pp. 145-6, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1960
Marvin, Abijah P., History of Lancaster 1652-1879, Lancaster 1879
Town Clerk and Selectmen's records
Correspondence with Donald Jackson, HAER

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 1/4 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Clinton, MA

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 19 280215 4702390

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

E

G

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D

F

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Atherton Bridge is located on Bolton Road where the road crosses the Nashua River.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Elizabeth T. Durfee
Inventory Coordinator

with Phyllis and Lee Farnsworth
(for) Lancaster Historical Commission

ORGANIZATION
Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE
July 1, 1979

STREET & NUMBER
294 Washington Street

TELEPHONE
617-727-8470

CITY OR TOWN
Boston,

STATE
Massachusetts

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ☒

STATE ☐

LOCAL ☐

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Patricia R. Weselowski

7/18/79

TITLE

Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

ATTEST: KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION





1. Atherton Bridge, looking northeast. (Photograph, Phyllis A. Farnsworth, August 1977)