



*The Cornish-Windsor covered bridge (1866) spanning the Connecticut River, between Cornish, N.H., and Windsor, Vt., 1984*

New England railroads were still constructing wooden spans such as the 103-foot-span double-lattice covered truss at Wolcott, Vt. Because of their complexity and expense, most wooden bridges longer than 40 feet were built by specialists in heavy timber framing and were often constructed off the river and rolled into position across temporary falsework.

Covered bridges are a tourist attraction in New England, and their importance as examples of historic engineering guarantees a commitment to preserve those that remain, most of which now see only moderate or light vehicular use. Once destroyed by the thousands to make way for modern road systems, they are today threatened by fire, flooding, and lack of maintenance. The disappointing performance of concrete highway bridges has led to some interest in new wooden bridges, which are relatively unaffected by road salt. New covered wooden highway bridges have been constructed in Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire in the past decade, and others are presently being designed for Massachusetts.

Richard Sanders Allen, *Covered Bridges of the Northeast* (1957); American Society of Civil Engineers, *American Wooden Bridges* (1976); Herbert Wheaton Congdon, *The Covered Bridge* (1973); Milton S. Graton, *The Last of the Covered Bridge Builders* (1990 [1978]); Joseph C. Nelson, *Spanning Time: Vermont's Covered Bridges* (1997); Lee H. Nelson, *The Colossus of 1812: An American Engineering Superlative* (1990).

*Jan Leo Lewandoski*

**Diners** Diners, movable restaurants featuring simple, homey meals, originated in Providence in 1872, when Walter Scott began to sell

hot food from a horse-drawn wagon to hungry newspaper workers. Scott operated his cart business until 1917 and ushered in one of New England's most popular types of eateries and one of its most distinctive manufacturing industries. Eventually, horse-drawn carts became enclosed "lunch-wagon" restaurants on wheels that could seat almost 30 people. Many of these wagons were manufactured in Worcester, Mass., by the Worcester Lunch Car Company, which operated from 1906 to 1961. By 1940 more than 6,500 diners operated

throughout the United States, but their numbers declined dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s. Late in the 1970s a movement to restore old diner cars as working restaurants began in New England, and diners once again became a respected and familiar part of the local culinary landscape.

Immediately after Scott started his food-wagon business, his idea spread throughout Providence and southern New England, and New Englanders vied to create ever-more-elaborate lunch carts. Charles H. Palmer of Worcester entered the diner business in 1889 and was to become one of the most important figures in New England diner history. Beginning in 1891, Palmer patented several lunch-wagon designs that were to become the industry standard. His long, narrow diners featured wheels that allowed the restaurants to be moved easily, and offered both sit-down and take-out service. With Palmer's help, diners by the turn of the century had become a signature feature of New England.

Although diner cars were manufactured in several factories around the United States, Worcester retained its central importance to the industry. Worcester Lunch Cars, among the most popular diners in the country throughout the 20th century, were built primarily by French Canadian immigrant craftsmen and factory workers. As the diner became an icon of American culture between the 1920s and the 1950s, it retained its New England identification.

Though challenged by fast-food restaurants during the late 1960s, many New England diners continued to operate even as the



*Miss Bellows Falls Diner, in Bellows Falls, Vt., was made by the Worcester Lunch Car Company*