

Guide to the Groton Iron Bridge Company Collection

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COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

Charles and Lyman Perrigo started the Groton Iron Works in 1852, while Daniel Spencer and Frederick Avery began the Groton Separator Works in 1847 to manufacture agricultural implements. These two companies joined to form the Groton Iron Bridge Works in 1877, using a design based on the Avery-Bartholomew Patent Railroad Iron Bridge. This created an iron arch bridge using railroad rails. An early example of this design is still displayed in a park in the center of Groton.

When the late 1800s saw great expansion of roads and railroads, the company prospered as many bridges were needed. Groton Iron Bridge erected more than 300 bridges between 1877 and 1885, occupying many buildings in Groton and employing some 150 men. Reincorporated in 1887 as the Groton Bridge and Manufacturing Company, the company made “iron and steel bridges, iron pilings for bridges, portable steam engines, grain separators, sluice pipes, steel buildings and even road building equipment.”

Corydon Conger worked to amass savings, most of which were lost in the Panic of 1857. But he continued, later investing in the Southern Central Railroad and then began a store in Groton in 1870. The Conger family invested in the bridge company, with son Frank becoming vice-president and later president. By 1900 J. P. Morgan, the noted financier, sought to control bridge building in the United States and bought out some 23 companies, including Groton Bridge forming American Bridge Company, soon a subsidiary of Morgan’s United States Steel.

A suit brought in 1906 by E. W. Knickerbocker on behalf of himself and other stockholders against Groton Bridge and Manufacturing Company alleged that the company was improperly dissolved allowing the Congers to profit from the sale to American Bridge while stockholders were shut out. The suit failed on various legal grounds and also failed on appeal.

In 1902, Frank's brothers Jay and Benn Conger, along with E. A. Landon as manager, bought the company back from American Bridge, and expanded production to a wide variety of industrial products.

Despite their efforts, the company declined and by 1913, only 25 employees remained. Though they even pioneered concrete arch bridges, in 1920 the company's remains were sold back to American Bridge.

This collection is based, initially, on Pamela Jo Thurber's 1984 Master's Thesis in Historic Preservation Planning on the Groton Iron Bridge Company. As well as Thurber's thesis, the collection includes relevant newspaper articles, additional presentations she gave to local historical societies, notes and labels for a History Center exhibit on the company and additional materials concerning the company, its owners and some of the bridges it built.

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