

# Region

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PAGE A5

## In new book, Chandler bridges love for history and the Granite State

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If you're seeking a leading authority on New Hampshire's covered bridges, look no further than Hancock. There, you'll find a resident who has dedicated the past 11 years of her life to visiting, photographing and researching the roughly 60 covered bridges around the state from Winchester to Pittsburgh.

### MONADNOCK PROFILE

Next month, Kim Varney Chandler will launch her new book, "Covered Bridges of New Hampshire," a project she initiated when she returned to the state after a decade in the South. It's been a way for her to bridge a stronger bond with her home since her research began right in her backyard.

Her work started when she moved from Virginia to her current home with her husband, Marshall Chandler, in 2012 and discovered the Hancock-Greenfield Bridge, known locally as the County Bridge.

Chandler's attraction to the bridge inspired her to seek out other bridges she learned of in the Monadnock Region.

"When our friends from Virginia came to visit and were looking for things to do, we hiked up [Mount] Monadnock and blew out my friend Susie's knee, so we decided hiking probably wasn't a good idea," Chandler recalled. "Then we discovered that Swanzey had four covered bridges, so we went and visited those."

That detour sparked a curiosity in Chandler, who decided to search online how many remaining covered bridges the state has, and she soon visited Cornish, Langdon and Hopkinton where there are collectively eight. But between working as the school counseling director at ConVal Regional High School in Peterborough and other hobbies, she said her life "got in the way," largely leaving what was then only meant to be a personal goal to visit more covered bridges in limbo.

"And then, COVID hit, and we were doing a lot of outdoors things," Chandler said. "We discovered hiking trails that we didn't even know were here after eight years of being here. That's



Photos by HANNAH SCHROEDER / Sentinel Staff

Kim Varney Chandler of Hancock poses for a portrait at Sawyers Crossing Bridge in Swanzey Friday afternoon. Chandler is the author of "The Covered Bridges of New Hampshire."

when I decided we were going to go back and attack this list."

She resumed serious efforts to visit every covered bridge in the state in 2020, and this time she sought help from other sources to find out more about them. It just so happens the non-profit National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges is in Hillsboro. By connecting with the non-profit, Chandler met President Bill Caswell, who said he is grateful for her work, and doesn't know of any book with the level of detail Chandler wrote.

"She not only included the stories that have been repeated about a particular bridge in prior publications, but in many cases was able to document the sources of that information," Caswell said in an email.

The NSPCB was formed in 1950 to raise awareness of maintaining existing historic wood truss bridges, according to Caswell. He said his organization provided Chandler with historic photographs and loaned materials from its archives, and that he shared information from his own research.

"Like most other historic artifacts, covered bridges have something to teach us about our past," Caswell wrote. "When they

were originally constructed, they represented advanced technology in bridge construction."

Chandler also started work with Alan Rumrill, director of the Historical Society of Cheshire County in Keene, who helped supply archival documents as she was conducting research. She recalled visiting the historical society to meet Rumrill, who lent her boxes of collected histories of the state's covered bridges, newspaper articles and an assortment of bridge photos donated by a photographer.

"[Rumrill] asked kind of offhandedly what I was going to do with this, and I said I'd probably do a website," Chandler said. "Then he said, 'You should write a book,' and I said, 'I can't write a book; a book is a big thing.'"

Chandler left her job at ConVal to accept a role as a counselor at Fall Mountain Regional High School in Langdon about three years ago.

"As that position [at ConVal] grew, I had fewer students on my caseload, and I really like working with kids," she said. "So I took the job as just a regular counselor at Fall Mountain where I have more kids I get to work with directly, and I love it."

The nature of her job in learning what's troubling children in school and helping find solutions relates to an innate drive Chandler said she has to find out the history of places where she's traveling and why it's important.

"I just love knowing what happened in places and who was there before us," she said.

Chandler was born in Jacksonville, N.C., where her father, Ray, was stationed as a servicemember in the U.S. Marine Corps. When Chandler was an infant, the family moved back to Rochester, where her parents had grown up and met, to be close to family.

"When I was out with my friends I would be like, 'This is where he lived, and this is where this happened,' and it's like, 'Oh my God, stop talking,'" she said, rolling her eyes.

Upon graduating in 1991, Chandler moved to Portsmouth, where she worked at and later managed Portsmouth Harbor Cruises. But while she enjoyed the job, it wasn't quite

**"MATH IS NOT MY THING, AND ENGINEERING IS NOT MY FIRST LANGUAGE, AND I TELL PEOPLE THAT IF YOU WANT TO READ ABOUT THOSE THERE'S DIFFERENT BOOKS FOR THAT. BUT I HAVE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT THE WAY THAT THESE BRIDGES WORK, AND IT'S FASCINATING TO ME, ESPECIALLY SOME OF THE MORE COMPLEX TRUSS DESIGNS AND THE FACT THAT THEY'RE STILL STANDING."**

— KIM CHANDLER

She attended Spaulding High School, where she met Marshall at the school bus stop, though the two parted ways.

Chandler received a bachelor's degree in business at the University of New Hampshire in Durham. She formed her early interests in history there, and received a minor in the subject.

"I took a New Hampshire history class just to fill out gen ed, and I loved it," Chandler said. "I had to do a paper where we picked a Revolutionary War hero or someone from New Hampshire, so I picked John Sullivan, who was from Durham."

Sullivan was a Revolutionary War general, a delegate to the Continental Congress, a U.S. District Court judge for the District of New Hampshire and the state's third governor.

Chandler said through her paper on Sullivan, she became "that person who did all the research."

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Upon graduating in 1991, Chandler moved to Portsmouth, where she worked at and later managed Portsmouth Harbor Cruises. But while she enjoyed the job, it wasn't quite

the career niche she was after.

"I wanted to be a dean of students or a student activities director on a college campus, because I was very involved when I was on campus," Chandler said. "So I went back to UNH for my counseling degree, but when it was time to sign up for your internship, I guess I missed the memo and ended up in high school instead of a clinical setting. But I loved it, so that changed my whole career focus."

After receiving her master's in counseling, she reconnected with Marshall, who was stationed in Virginia in the U.S. Navy. She moved to Hampton, Va., where the two married in 2003 and she gained two stepchildren, Chelsea and Bobby.

In Virginia, Chandler's draw to history showed through her interest in genealogy, where she learned she had a direct familial connection to the Revolutionary War and was able to join a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in nearby Yorktown, Va., the site where the war ended.

Her involvement in the DAR developed the research skills she would later use to chronicle all the Granite State's covered bridges and share her knowledge through her new book.

"I did a lot of work with the [DAR] chapter, going

through archives and scanning photos and documents, and I put together a history of the chapter and the 300-year-old custom house where [British Gen. Charles] Cornwallis surrendered," Chandler said. "I learned so much history in the South, which is different than here."

By 2012, she was ready to return to her home state. Having lived solely in the Seacoast Region during her years before Virginia, Chandler wasn't greatly familiar with the Monadnock Region, but she discovered Hancock while staying with a friend in Westmoreland while applying for a job.

And it was soon after she and her husband bought their home that she discovered the Hancock-Greenfield Bridge.

In her book, "Covered Bridges of New Hampshire," Chandler details a written history of each bridge she visited, from the oldest, the Blair Bridge built in 1829 in Campton, to newer bridges like the Tannery Hill Bridge in Gilford, built in 1995 by the town Rotary club. She describes the construction of each bridge, including information on the type of truss some have.

"Math is not my thing, and engineering is not my first language, and I tell people that if you want to read about those there's different books for that," Chandler said. "But I have learned a lot about the way that these bridges work, and it's fascinating to me, especially some of the more complex truss designs and the fact that they're still standing."

For each bridge, Chandler also provides her own personal photo of when she visited, dated by year, with some entries including a historical photo she sourced from her research. She said she hopes that research offers accurate, comprehensive histories.

"What I found is that with a lot of things in print, someone else will read it and reprint it and sometimes it's not fact," she said. "But unless you're looking, how would you know?"

And though the book is finished, Chandler has also been working on a podcast with the same name as her book set to debut on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other platforms Monday. Episodes will include interviews with Bob Durfee, vice president of engineering firm DuBois & King of Bedford; Sean James, senior vice president of Hoyle, Tanner & Associates of Manchester; and an episode on the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges.

Chandler's book hits store shelves Nov. 15 and is being published by Peter E. Randall Publisher of Portsmouth. She will host a book signing at Toadstool Bookshop in Peterborough on Oct. 29 where people can buy the book two weeks early.

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Kim Chandler

### AT A GLANCE: KIM CHANDLER

Age: 53

Hometown: Born in Jacksonville, N.C.; grew up in Rochester, N.H., until college, after which she moved to Portsmouth; lived in Hampton, Va., for 10 years; moved to Hancock, where she lives with her husband, Marshall, in 2012

Family: Husband, Marshall Chandler; stepchildren Chelsea Chandler and Bobby Chandler, both of Norfolk, Va.; parents Ray and Gail Chandler, of Rochester, N.H.

Pet: Dog, Pemi, 6, a chocolate Lab who is a trained therapy dog

Occupation: School counselor at Fall Mountain Regional High School in Langdon; previously served as school counseling director at ConVal Regional High School in Peterborough

Bibliography: "Covered Bridges of New Hampshire," to be published Nov. 15 by Peter E. Randall Publisher of Portsmouth

Hobbies: Genealogy, photography, birdwatching, hiking with Pemi, podcasting, researching

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