

MARKET STREET BRIDGE

CROSSING THE SUSQUEHANNA

WHEN?
1929

EVENT

Crossing the Susquehanna on a bridge created a way for passengers and goods to easily flow



WHERE? Wilkes-Barre, Pa

VOCABULARY

architect	piers
abutments	quicksand
ferries	toll

The 1,275-foot concrete span from Wilkes-Barre to Kingston handles tens of thousands of cars, trucks, and motorcycles every month. It also withstands the ice and highwater of the Susquehanna River. Of course, the bridge across the river wasn't always made of concrete. That came after three other bridges had been built.

Before the first bridge was constructed, ferries guided by ropes were used to carry people and goods across the river. It wasn't until 1817 that the first bridge was even begun. The \$47, 150 cost was enormous (Reynolds 1929). Raising the money wasn't the only challenge. The first



2nd Market St. Bridge with Steamboat on shoreline

piers were put into quicksand; the following year 18 inches of ice during the winter was followed by a thaw that took away two of the piers (Reynolds 1929). It took until 1819 to finally stretch the wooden platform bridge across the three stone piers with wooden sides and a roof. It had a toll booth at the entrance on the Wilkes-Barre side with a nearby house where the toll collector lived. According to

Reynolds, the toll collector was paid \$180 per year. Five years later in 1824, a storm took the bridge onto the ice below and then it was carried downstream the next day.

A second wooden bridge opened the following year. Lights fueled by natural gas were put up in 1858 (Reynolds 1929). Floods and thaws plagued the bridge travel in 1861, 1865, and 1875 tearing piers down or damaging the timbers. By 1888 another bridge was built at North Street which proved to be fortunate as the Market Street bridge was considered unsafe and had to be replaced. Traffic was heavy over the North Street span as the Market Street covered bridge was now being replaced by steel. The increased weight of electric trolleys that replaced horse drawn ones and traffic that now consisted of cars and trucks made the "modern" steel bridge at Market Street obsolete.

It would take until 1927 for plans, demolition, and construction to take place. The chosen architectural firm was Carere and Hastings from New York City. They already had impressive credentials according to Schooley: New York Public Library (1911); the Manhattan Bridge; the House and Senate buildings in Washington, D.C.; the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, Va. and others (Schooley 1987). Mayor Daniel Hart and a committee appointed by him had been working since 1921 to develop a plan to replace the steel Market Street bridge as part of the City Beautiful movement. Widening of the bridge and street, providing for trolley wires, at least

four lanes for traffic plus sidewalks and a center lane for the trolley took a lot of planning at a cost of \$384,000. The final project would tally over \$2,000,000 and would be built by Walter E. Rae of Pittsburgh.

The two architects graduated from l'Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Paris a school famous for teaching classical and Renaissance architecture (Schooley 1987). Thomas Atherton from Wilkes-Barre had also graduated from that school. He worked for Carere and Hasting and while there created drawings for a beautiful bridge very similar to the one constructed as the Market Street bridge. (His drawings had horses on top of the towers and not eagles.) He would not receive any credit for the drawings, however, probably due to the fact he created his own firm in 1919.

During construction two-way traffic would flow either on the old bridge or the new one. Steel towers 115 feet high were placed on each of the abutments to carry supplies on a 1500-foot cable from one side of the river to where it was needed (Schooley 1987). Schooley reports that the list of materials used "was impressive: 1,250,000 board feet of lumber; 52,900 cubic



yards of concrete; 66,310 barrels of cement, 38,000 tons of sand, 59,600 tons of gravel; 1,231 tons of reinforced steel plus granite masonry and limestone masonry" (Schooley 1987). When the span was fully completed in 1929, there were four very large towers (two on each side of the bridge) each topped with a 12-ton limestone eagle. Each tower also had a plaque attached with an inscription. Schooley notes the inscriptions read:

Wilkes-Barre, South Side

To the FORTITUDE of early settlers facing hardships, fearless and unflinching, we owe the origin of what we are
PERSEVERANCE

Wilkes-Barre, North Side

To the SERVICE of our heroes sacrificial on land and sea in every war glorious and forever unforgotten we pay homage PATRIOTISM

Kingston, South Side

To the INDUSTRY builded by human hand and brain on our mineral resources we owe growth influence and welfare PROSPERITY

Kingston, North Side

To the CULTURE begot by splendid schools and teachers we owe our rise in the higher realm of mind and spirit PROGRESS

The bridge was re-furbished in 1987. Check out the online resources for more pictures.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Times Leader Market St. Bridge](#)

[Discover NEPA](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Reynolds, Constance, *Address to the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society*, October 23, 1929.

Schooley, Ruth B. *The Market Street Bridges*. The Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, Wilkes-Barre. Pa. 1987.